

# **THE PEOPLE OF THE EASTERN HIMALAYAS**

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DEDICATED  
To  
Prof. L.P. VIDYARTHI

Without whose inspiration and guidance  
this book would not have seen the light of the day.

## FOREWORD

Assam State of India, has multiracial and linguistic group of people with different cultures of whom Dimasa Kachari, Mikirs and Zemi Nagas form a very important section of and are believed to be among the earliest settlers of Assam. They spread over the Brahmaputra Valley, North Assam, South and South east Assam and constitute a very important group of Indo-mongoloid people of east India.

In this book an attempt has been made to study the habitat, economy, culture and society of the tribes—a geographical introduction to cultural anthropology and Ethnology. Here the cultural contrast and similarities among the main ethnic groups of Assam have been made. Particular emphasis is laid upon the way of life of the tribes which is one of direct response determined by the environment and the queer beliefs of the tribes of Assam hills, which spring from the fertile imagination of the people. The various myths and legends are the results of the natural reaction of the tribes to their environment, a search for an explanation of the mystery of life.

Though we have monographs on Assam. This survey of the life and culture of the three typical tribes presents a panoramic view of the colourful tribes of Assam.

Mr. S.T. Das, the author, has varied experience, is a fellow of the Geographical Societies of U.K. and U.S.A. and Member of the International Biographical Center, Cambridge, has travelled widely and is rich in experience, and knowledge. He is the author of several well known books and Editor of the Anthropological Journal.

I am confident that this book will be greatly welcomed by the students of Anthropology.

In view of the geo-political and anthropological significance of the area, the book deserves to be released at an early date.

L.P. VIDYARTHI.

President

Date : 25.5.78.  
Ranchi University,  
INDIA.

IUAES and Xth International Congress  
Of anthropological and Ethnological  
Sciences, India.

## P R E F A C E

India is the home of some 22 million naturvolker, who have lived through centuries their own life in the remote parts of the country and it is these people that still afford opportunities to geographers and anthropologists to assess the influence of immediate environment on the mode of life. The Mikirs, Dimasa Kacharis and Zemi Nagas are the most important tribes, all the three live in the forested region of Brahmaputra Valley in Assam.

The life of the tribal people is simple and placid and often hard. But they have a rich cultural legacy—a myriad myths and legends which are interesting though rather strange. In the same manner as the Hindu Cherishes the stories of the Ramayana and The Mahabharata or the Christian loves to read from The Bible, the tribal people of Assam, like to relate or listen to the stories of long ago. They have usually emotional reactions to their environment, but to older generation, their mythological tales appear to cover almost every aspect of human life.

In this book an attempt has been made to study the habitat, economy and society of the people—a geographical introduction to ethnology. Here cultural contrast and similarities among the three ethnic groups of Assams have been made. The first part of the book deals with the Dimmsa Kachari, The second part with the Mikirs and the third part with the charming Zemi Nagas.

This brief study was written to fill a gap in the literature of Cultural Anthropology and cultural Geography. Particular emphasis is laid upon the way of life of the tribes which is one of direct response determined by the environment and the queer beliefs of the tribes of Assam hills, which spring from the fertile imagination of the people. The various myths and legends are the results of the natural reaction of the tribes to their environment, a search for an explanation of the mystery of life. There is no set pattern of socio-economic development of the tribes. They are a purely and strictly agricultural people, tied to their immediate environment which affords opportunity for cultivation. Though some of their customs are strange, others like the cooperative system which functions at all levels, are essentially democratic in nature.

In a book like this the author must acknowledge the assistance he has received from various authorities, writers and critics, who have offered valuable criticism and those whose books have helped the author draw his inspiration and collect citation. Omissions if any were not deliberate.

Special mention may be made to Dr. P. Dash Sharma, Dept. of Anthropology, Ranchi University, Dr. B. K. Roy, Assistant Registrar General of India, New Delhi, Dr. N. D. Bhattacharya, Economic Geographer, National Atlas Organisation of India and Mr. P. S. Pamar, I. E. S., Ministry of Industry, Govt. of India for valuable material help and critical suggestions. Dr. A.C. Singh, Dept. of Statistics, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada and Prof. M. Prasad, Dept. of Geography, University of Ottawa, Canada have helped me in arranging the material, for which I am grateful to them.

I am sincerely thankful to Prof. L. P. Vidyarthi, Head of the Dept. of Anthropology, University of Ranchi who has kindly gone through the manuscript and has given constructive suggestions. He has also written the foreword for my book.

Illustrations came from several sources I am specially grateful to Mr. Gupta, Press Information Bureau for prompt and timely help. Also I am thankful to Shri Narinder Sagar, my sincere friend for early publication of the book.

I have also to mention my deep debt that I owe to my daughters Nivedita and Sunandita for their unending help and cooperation through out.

My wife, Mina Das, has shared the challenge of rethinking and reworking at every stage; my deepest, debts intellectual and personal, are to her.

Last but not least, I record my sincere gratitude to those who have been quoted and to those from whom help and suggestions have been obtained.

Delhi-7  
April '78

S. T. DAS

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# DIMASA KACHARIS

## PART I

## *Introduction*

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Assam State of India, has multiracial and linguistic groups of people with different cultures of whom the Boro Kacharis or the Bodos form a very important section of these groups and are believed to be among the earliest settlers of Assam. At one time they built a powerful kingdom with their capital at Dimapur and then at Maibong and Khaspur. They spread over the Brahmaputra Valley, North Bengal and Bangladesh and constitute a very important group of Indo-Mogoloid people of the east. Those who live in scattered hamlets along the foothills of the Himalayas in the North-East as well as in scattered areas of the Brahmaputra Valley, have now been mixed up with the neighbouring peoples. But they still call themselves 'Boro or Bodo' although they are otherwise known as 'Kacharis' in the Assam Valley. A section of this tribe who have gradually become Hindus speaking Assamese and considering their status to be higher than that of the Kacharis are known as the Koches. In the Brahmaputra Valley, the greatest concentration of this tribe is in the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrange and Nowgong. They also skirted the southern bend of the Brahmaputra and occupied the Garo Hills

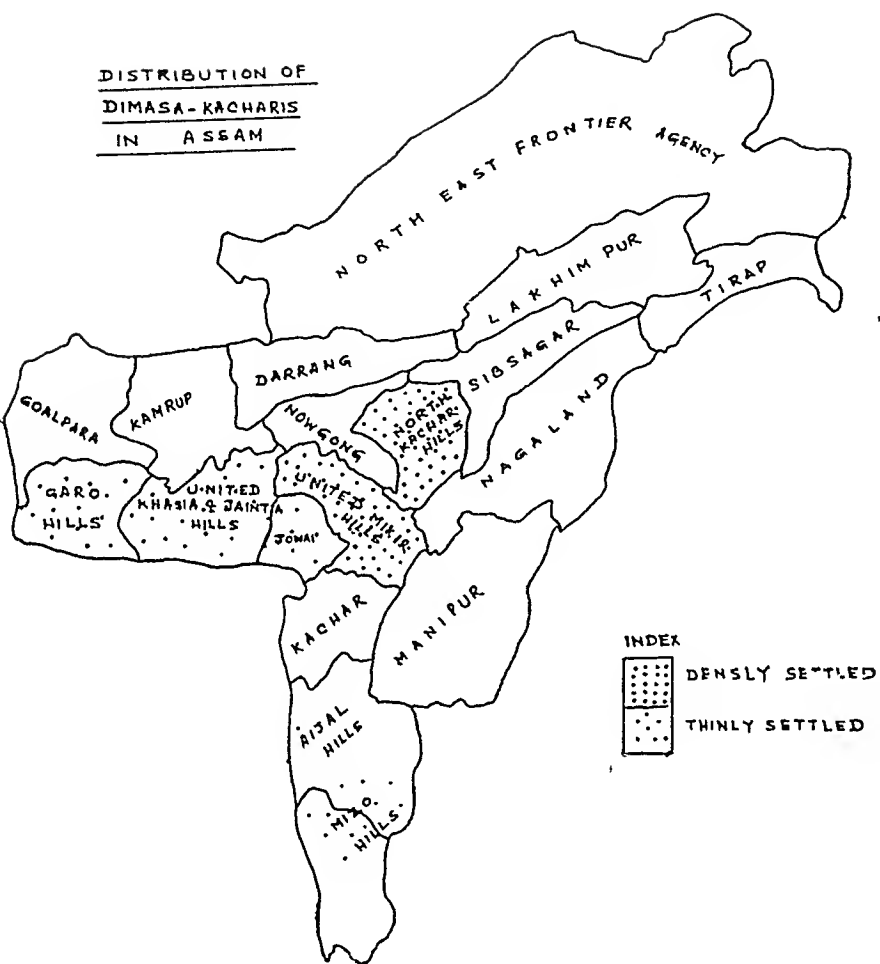


where the Garos still show close affinity with them. South of the Garo Hills, they spread in northern Mymensingh where the semi-Bengalized Hajong tribe shows that it is of Bodo origin. In the borders of North Cachar Hills and Dimapur, there are two distinct groups known as Dimasas and Meches who also call themselves Bodos or Kacharis. In the range of hills south of the Surma Valley there are the Tipperahs whose language is a branch of the ancient Bodo.

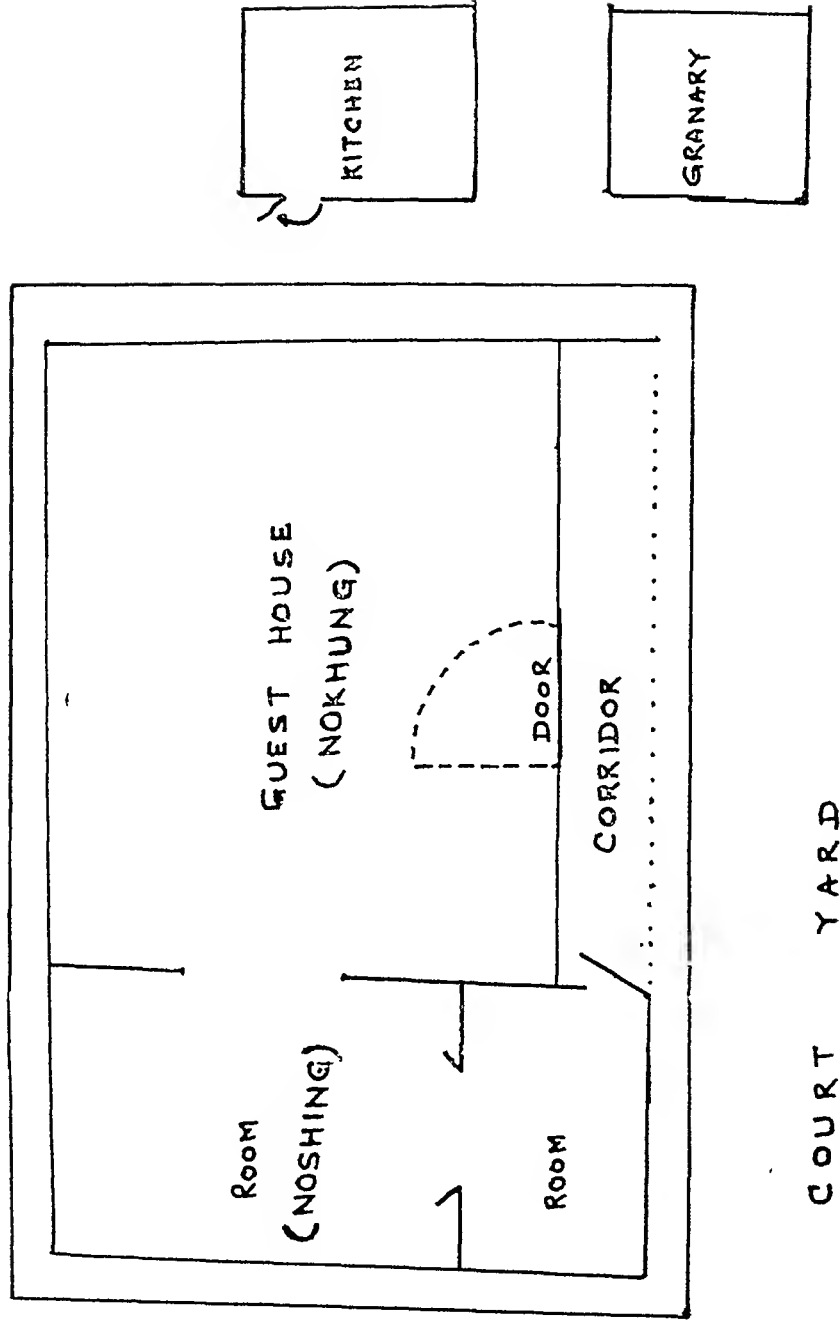
Attempts were made to find out the local belief about their origin, but most of the villagers practically knew nothing about it although some of them were of the opinion that they are the direct descendants of Hirimba, a wife of Bhima. Such mythological origins are however common among Hindu India.

Sri M.M. Brahma, research scholar of the Tribal Culture and Folklore Research Department of the Gauhati University in his collection of the 'Folk-songs of the Bodos' remarked that "In so far as the Bodo language is concerned, there is little doubt that the language is very rich in vocabulary and is specially noted for its phonological peculiarity". Though the language is widely current not only in Assam but also in some parts of West Bengal, there is no Bodo alphabet as such. In an article 'Boro Lipi' (Boro alphabet) by Shri Gahin Basumatari published in the issue of Asom Bani dated November 22, 1963 it is stated that in the Brahmaputra Valley, the Boro Kacharis use both the Assamese as well as the Roman alphabets in Bodo literature. Since times immemorial, the Bodos living in the districts of Goalpara, Darrange and Kamrup have composed Bodo songs, poems and dramas in the Assamese alphabet and the first Bodo journal, the 'Bibar', was also published in the Assamese alphabet in 1923. Due to the interaction of cultures, it is found that words of both Assamese and Boro languages are found in either language. The Kachari Rajas, during their reign, took immense interest in the growth and development of Assamese literature. Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, in his 'Kachari Buranji' thoroughly, discussed this point and, according to him, one king of Cachar was the patron of Madhab Kandali who translated the Ramayana into Assamese.

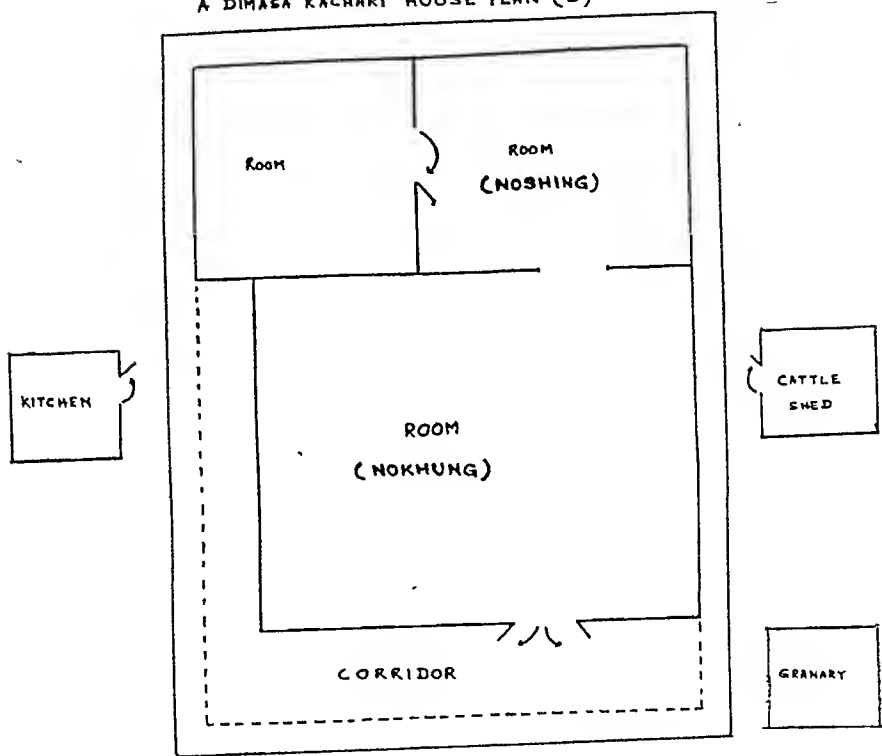
DISTRIBUTION OF  
DIMASA-KACHARIS  
IN ASAM



A DIMASA - KACHARI HOUSE PLAN (A)



A DIMASA KACHARI HOUSE PLAN (B)



C O U R T Y A R D.



*Bodo Kachari Dance*



*Garo Dance*

The majority of the people of this community are bilingual in the sense that they use their own Bodo dialect in speaking among themselves while Assamese is used as the medium of expression with the neighbouring Assamese people.

### **Race and Physical Appearance**

Considering the linguistic affinities of the Kacharis with the Garos as well as the tribes known under different names as Dhimal, Chutiya, Koch, Rabha, Meeh etc. many authors opine the possibility of existence of some ethnological relationship between these tribes, but without thorough anthropometric data it is difficult to say to what extent such racial affinities exist among them. Some scholars like Prof. S.K. Chatterjee include the Bodos under the Indo-Mongoloid Stock, while Haddon finds the Dolichocephalic Platyrrhine (Pre-dravidian) racial elements in the tribe. In physique, the men and women are as a rule medium-statured and well built, strong and healthy.

### **Religion, Caste and Community**

The villagers generally call themselves Hindus, although one section is under the influence of the Brahma Samaj—a reformist cult. The Brahma Samajis have adopted a new mode of worshipping the deities and all the religious parts connected with their social occasions are performed according to the Hindu rites. The main annual festival amongst this Brahma group is the 'mahalaya'. They perform the religious ceremonies through the observance of the 'homa ceremony' and frequent offerings are made to fire through the enchanting of 'slokas' from the religious scripts. The other non-Brahmas who also call themselves Hindus still owe allegiance to their traditional tribal deities and still annually perform the 'Kherai and garja' community worships. They believe in the existence and active interference in the affairs of men of certain invisible spiritual beings, considered as evil spirits which cause one's sickness and other natural calamities and are for the most part influenced by malevolent motives, the ill effects of which towards mankind is overcome by frequent offerings of rice,

plantain, pigs, goats, poultry, etc. to the household deity. Bathau Bodo or Mainao, and also by the performance of the Kherai puja or the garja puja. There is of course a tendency among them to identify the tribal deities with the Hindu gods and goddesses through a process of syncretism and hence Bathau is being frequently identified with Siva and Mainao with Lakshmi—a typical symptom of the influence of Brahminism.

## Language

The language of the people is Kachari and the speakers of this language consist of Boros, Bodos, Garos, Hajongs, Koches, Lalungs, Meehes, Rabhas, Chutiyas, and Tipperahs. In the Census Report of 1961, this language is grouped under the Tibeto-Burman family which is a branch of the Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese family according to the Linguistic Survey of India.

As the plains tribals live along with the Assamese people and no where are they in big concentrations, they of necessity have to learn Assamese and they do speak Assamese while conversing with their neighbours. But among themselves they speak their own language. With Independence and a new realization of their selfhood, the Kachari people are now definitely trying to re-discover their personality as well as their old traditional customs, manner and beliefs. The 1961 Census has revealed that the number of speakers of Boro is 280,343 apart from the Dimasa, Kachari, Lalung and Rabha speakers who number 32,077 ; 64,421 ; 10,576 and 38,308 respectively. Compared with the figures of the 1951 Census and earlier Censuses, these figures do not fail to show that the plains tribals are now all out to re-discover themselves. The Kacharis are now having primary schools in their own mother tongue and they are also clamouring for higher secondary schools and high schools with Kacharis as the medium of instruction in areas where they are in concentrations.

In the sphere of their community life, the villagers form what looks like one large joint family where people commonly share their pleasures and pains, joys and sorrows. Mutual co-opera-

tion and help, both in individual and common cases, are exchanged whenever occasions demands, either in social or economic life. They are deeply attached to their social and religious customs and usages. When the young folk sing and dance, in which respect they are very rich, they forget all the worries of life. The followers of the Brahma religion also still maintains the tie of relationship with those who are yet to come under the same canopy of their religious principle and inter-change of marriages is still prevalent between the two groups.

The people are peace-loving and easy going. Any dispute among themselves is still settled by the 'Gaonbora' and they need hardly refer any case to the Kachari Samaj—a bigger organisation which controls the entire judiciary of the tribal population with its own jurisprudence. But the wind of change has started blowing, and sooner or later the naive people of this beautiful hill will be cast into the maelstrom of social, political and economic upheaval. May its people withstand the stress and strain of the change-over and may they preserve for ever what is good and distinctive in their tradition.



## *History of Dimasa Kachari*

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The Mongoloid people of India, speaking various languages and dialects of the Sino-Tibetan language family appears to have started to come to India through the Eastern and Northern gate of the country from over 3,000 years ago. The basic Mongoloid element which gives the tone to the population of Assam is very largely a contribution of the Bodo tribe (Chatterjee 1959). According to Chatterjee (1959) the Bodos at one time had formed a solid block of a Mongoloid people throughout the whole of North Bihar, North Bengal, East Bengal, and the Brahmaputra valley, with extensions in the Cachar Hills, the Garo Hills and in the Tripura Hills. Local Austric and Dravidian elements were in possibility absorbed by the Bodos.

In Mahabharata (which dates back to the middle of the 10th Cent. B.C.) mention has been made of Bhagadatta — a powerful king-who came with his host of *Kirata* and Cina troops and took part in the battle of *Mahabharata* as an ally of Kauravas. *Kirata* appears to be the name by which the Aryan speakers knew the Indo-Mongoloid. The Bodo (Bara)

tribes are linguistically connected with the Nagas, where as the Naga have always remained isolated, but the Bodos spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley and North Bengal as well as East Bengal, forming a solid block of Indo-Mongoloid (Kirata) people in Eastern India (Chatterjee, 1951).

In the *Puranas*, mention has been made of the ancient dynasty of Assam consisting of Hinduised Bodos, as belonging to the family of Narakasura, of which Bhagadatta was a branch, and appear to have ruled over Assam, right down to the middle of the 1st millennium A.D. (Chatterjee, 1959). We do not have any direct evidence of happenings in Assam from the time of *Mahabharata* right down to the time of Bhaskar Varman (7th Cent. A.D.) According to Chatterjee (1959) the Bodos have kept up their tribal identity by maintaining their language which has dispersed in several detached pockets in Kachar (both hills and plains) and in Chutiya area to the north of Brahmapura, and in Central and Western districts of Assam as well as in the North and East Bengal, where they are found as Rabhas, Mechs, Rajbansis and Garos (within the Garo Hills), as well as Hajongs and as Tipras in Tripura. Thus it would appear from the foregoing account that the inhabitation of Kachar (of hills and plains) are of Bodo origin as evidenced linguistically.

According to Endle (1911, p.4) that the people known to us as Kacharis and to themselves as Bada (Bara) were in earlier days the dominant race in Assam. By Bada or Bara he implies the Bodo race as evidenced from his Mounmental work on the Kacharis (1911). Endle divided the Kachari group into two broad groups.

- (1) Northern group
- (2) Southern group as follows, where the Brahmaputra was taken roughly as the dividing line.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Area of Habitation</i>
-------------	---------------------------

**I. Northern Groups.**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Bara (Kachari)                              | Western Darraang Kachari, Duars and in North Kamrup.        |
| 2. Rabha (Tolata)                              | Goalpara.   |
| 3. Mech (mes)                                  | Do.   |
| 4. Dhimal                                      | North-east Bengal   |
| 5. Koch  | On Northern Frontier from Jalpaiguri to North-west Darrang. |
| 6. Solanimiyas                                 | Only in Mangaldai sub-division.                             |
| 7. Mahaliyas )<br>Phulgariyas )<br>Saraniyas ) | Western Darrange:<br>All slightly<br>Hinduised Kacharis     |

**II. Southern Groups**

- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Di-ma-sa "Big-water folk"     | North Cachar Hills                                    |
| 2. Hojais                        | Do and Nowgong  |
| 3. Lalungs                       | South-west Nowgong and adjoining districts.           |
| 4. Garos                         | On Garo Hills and at foot of same.                    |
| 5. Haijongs                      | On plains adjoining southern slope of the Garos Hills |
| 6. Hill Tippera (Tripura) People |   |

According to Allen (1905, p. 23) the Kacharis or Bara (mispronounced Bodo) as they call themselves, belong to the great Bodo tribe, whose original habitat was somewhere between the upper waters of the *Yang tse-kiang* and *Hoang-ho*, and they gradually spread in successive waves of immigration over the greater part of Assam. Kacharis who had ruled in different parts of Assam from time immemorial to the middle of the Nineteenth century A.D. are traditionally known as Kiratas (Nath, 1959) Kacharis of North Cachar Hills are known as Dimasa Kacharis (Allen 1905).

Dimasa Kachari is a Scheduled tribe of Assam as given in the President's Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes list modification order, 1956.

Allen (1905) has given the following account for the separation of the Bodo and Dimasa, but according to him no trace of the story has been found amongst the Kacharis of Darrang. "Long ago the Dimasa fought against a powerful tribe and were beaten in pitched battle. They were compelled to give ground, but after a time further retreat was debarred by a wide and deep river. In despair the king resolved to fight again on the following day, out in the night a god appeared to him and told him that the next morning the army could cross the river if they entered it at a spot where they saw a heron standing on the bank. No one, however, was to look back while the movement was in progress. The dream proved true...A heron was seen standing on the bank, and the king and a great portion of his people crossed in safety. A man then turned to see whether his son was following, when the waters suddenly rose and swept away those who were in the river bed and prevented the others from crossing. The Dimasa were those who succeeded in reaching the further bank of safety".

Allen (1903) stated that this legend account for the separation of the Bodo and the Dimasa find no place among the Kacharies of Goalpara (Kacharis of Goalpara are known as Mcch). Thus one tribe style themselves as Bara and the other Dimasa, though both use languages of Bodo origin.

According to Allen (1903, p. 45) the Mech tribe is believed to be absolutely identical with the Kacharis. But the Dimasa Kacharis of the N.C. Hills does not support the views expressed by Allen (1903) in total, but they have not denied that the Mechs are also a branch of Kacharies which got separated in distant part, but how and when is not known, probably lost in the mist of the history.

Allen (1905 p. 90) stated that the Totlas are a superior section of the Kacharis, and occupy an intermediate position between the Kacharis and the Koch. Kacharis when they are converted to Hinduism, were generally incorporated into the ranks of the Koch caste, in lower Assam (Assam District Gazetteers, Vol. VII, 1905, p. 86-87). According to Allen (1905, p. 76) the Kacharis at Nowgong are divided into two sections, these who live in the Barbhangha, Dhing and Khatoalgaoon manzas near the Brahmaputra are said to be Bodos akin to the Kacharis of Darrang, while those in the valley of Kapiti are Dimasa. The former are known as Jharuas, or Chaidvaria, Kacharis the latter as Hojais,... There are no subdivisions amongst the Jharuas, but the Hojais are said to be divided into endogamous clans as Rabha, Ramsa, Kheremia Thengal, Sonwal and Jaladha".

The Kacharis may perhaps be described as the earliest known aboriginal inhabitants of the Brahmaputra Valley. They are identical with the people called Mech in Goalpara and North-Bengal. These are the names given to them by outsiders. In the Brahmaputra Valley the Kacharis call themselves Bodo or Bodo fisa (sons of Bodo). According to Endle (1911) the Kacharis became widely separated as the Western (Bara) and Southern (Dimasa) sections. In the North Cachar Hills they themselves Dimasa, a corruption of Dima fisa or "sons of the great river". They were known to the Ahom as Dimisa, clearly a corruption of Dimasa, so that this name must have been in use when they were still in the Dhansiri Valley (Gait, 1963). According to Endle (1911, p. 4). "It is indeed not all unlikely that the people known to us as Kacharias and to themselves as Bada (Bara) were in earlier days the dominant race in Assam;... have left traces of this domination in the nomenclature of some

of the physical features of the country, e.g., the Kachari word for water (di ; doi) apparently forms the first syllable of the names of many of the chief rivers of the province, such as, Diputa, Dihong, Dibong, Dibru, Dihing, Dimu, Desang, Diku etc. and to these may be added Dikrang, Dipu, Digaru etc., all near Sadiya, the earliest known centre of Chutiya (Kachari) power and civilization”.

“The origin of the word Kachari (the first is short in Assamese and long in Bengali) is difficult to trace, but it may be mentioned that, according to the Limbu legend of creation given by Risley in the *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, one of the two progenitors of the human race settled in the Kachar country, which is the name given by the Nepalese to the tract at the foot of the Hills between the Brahmaputra and Kosi Rivers; and there became the father of the Koch, Mech and Dhimal tribes, or the head-quarters of a powerful Mech dynasty, the member of the tribe in Assam may well have been called Khacharis or Kacharis. The Kacharis are believed to very closely allied to the Koches, and also, so far at least as language is concerned, to the Chutiyas, Lalungs and Morans of the Brahmaputra valley, and to the Garos and Tipperas of the Southern hills. Having regard to their wide distribution, and to the extent of the country over which Bodo languages of a very uniform type are still and current, it seems not improbable that at one time the major part of Assam and North East Bengal formed a great Bodo Kingdom” (Gait, p. 1963).

Ahom, a branch of the Shan race, crossed the Patkoi (Patkai) range to the South-east of Assam in the early years of the 13th century A.D. (1228—A.D.) under the leadership of Sukapha who was compelled to leave his ancestral kingdom of Nara as he had no prospect of sovereignty there. The Ahoms ruled in Assam from A.D. 1228 to 1826 A.D. till it passed into the hands of the British by the Treaty of Yanadaboo (Bhuyan, p. XVIII, 1933). According to Hem Barua (1926) the Ahoms are a great Mongoloid race of Hukwang (Hukawang) valley, who migrated into Assam in the 13th Century, through the Patkoi range.

According to Anderson (c.f. Endle, p. XVI) the Dimasa, Great-River-Folk (di-means "rivers" or "water"), were driven out of the valley of the great river Brahmaputra in historical times, and finally became rullers of what is now known as the Cachar District.

There are no written records of Kachari rule, and the traditions current amongst the people, consist of title more than long lists of kings, on the accuracy of which it is impossible to rely. According to Fisher the Kacharis of North cachar believe that they once ruled in Kamarupa, and their royal family traced its descent from Rajas of that Country, of the line of Hatsungtsa. How long this kingdom existed, it is now impossible to say ; but what is known with some degree of certainty is, that they were engaged in a prolonged struggle with the Ahoms, a section of the great Shan (Tai) race, who crossed the Patkai Hills from the south and east about A.D. 1228 and subdued the Morans, Borahis and other Kachari tribes living near the Northern slopes of these hills (Endle, 1911, p. 6).

According to Barman (unpublished manuscript) (1968), originally, this eastern region of Bharata was termed as Kachchha Desha, indicating land of Runn or narrow sea gulf, and the people of this region used to be termed as Kachchhari, meaning the inhabitants of the land, called Kachcha.

The Ahoms gradually subdued the Kacharis who drove their opponents to take refuge in or about Dimapur on the Dhansiri at the foot of the Naga Hills. In Dimapur the Kacharies were in comparative security and they appeared to have attained a high degree of material civilization evidenced from the architecture and archaeological remains (through not fully excavated of the Kachari kingdom.

This section of the Kacharies are known as the Dimasas. According to Barman (1966), "Hidimba-pur" (pronounced as Hihimbapur) was the real name of this capital and kingdom. Reference is there in the Mahabharata, that Bhima, the second of the Pandava brothers, married the demon princess, Hidinba (Hirhimbaa), sister of the local potentate of terrible ways, then

called Rakshasa.....The ruling family of the Kachchharis, since the days of antiquity, therefore, assumed the distinction of Hidimbba-chha, meaning the progeny of Hidimbbaa, then generic mother. This term, Hidimbba-chha, got distorted into Dimabaachha, and then into Dimachha or Dimasa in the later phase".

The Dimasa Kacharies could not live in the peace and prosperity for a long time because their ancient foes, Ahom, followed them up to their new capital Dimapur, and about the middle of the sixteenth century the Ahoms succeeded in capturing and sacking Dimapur itself. The Kachari Raja thereupon removed his capital to Maibong which is at a considerable distance from Dimapur (Maibong literary means "much paddy"). At Maibong the Kachari dynasty would seem to have maintained itself for some two centuries (Endle 1911). According to Endle (1911), under pressure of an attack by the Jaintia Raja the Kachari sovereign withdrew from Maibong to Khaspur in Kachar (circa 1750 A.D.) There they seem to have come more and more under Hindu influence, until about 1790 the Raja of that period, Krishna Chandra, and his brother Govinda Chandra made a public profession of Brahminism. They were both placed for a time inside the body of a large copper image of cow, and on emerging thence were declared by the Brahmins to be Hindus of the Kshatriya caste, Bhima of Mahabharata fame being assigned to them as a mythological ancestor. Hence to this day the Darrange Kacharis sometimes speak of themselves as "Bhim-ni-sa" i.e., children of Bhim, though as a rule they seem to attach little or no value to this highly imaginative ancestry.

According to Endle (1911, p.7), the region of the last Kachari King, Govind Chandra, was little better than one continuous flight from place to place through the constant attacks of the Burmese, who finally compelled the unhappy monarch to take refuge in the adjoining British district of Sylhet. He was, indeed, reinstated in power by the aid of the East India Company's troops in 1826, but was murdered some four years later, when his kingdom became part of the British dominions. His commander-in-chief, one Tula Ram, was allowed to remain in



possession of a portion of the sub-division now known as North Cachar, a region show in old maps of Assam as "Tula Ram Senapati's country". But on the death of this chieftain in 1854, this remaining portion of the old Kachari Raj was formally annexed to the district of Nowgong.

As regards this last mentioned migration, i.e., from Maibong to Khaspur about A.D. 1750, and the conversion to Hinduism which soon followed it, it would seem that the movement was only a very limited and restricted one, confined indeed very largely to the Raja and the members of his court. The great majority of his people remained in the hill country, where to this day they retain their language, religion, customs etc. to a great extent" (Endle, 1911).

Even to this day they are sticking fairly rigidly to their old customs and practises unlike the Ahoms.

### **Population**

The Dimasa section of the Kachari people are mainly concentrated in the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills. The district covers an area of 5891.7 square miles and has a population (1951) of 165,444 in which the Dimasa number 14,714. It is larger than any autonomous hill district of Assam and it shows the lowest density barring the NEFA region, being only 28 per square mile.

The earlier census figures of the Dimasa Kachari Population is as follows :

1931	—	14,680
1941	—	15,971
1951	—	14,714

The total number of Dimasa in Assam, according to the Census of 1961 is 68,718.

Population trend of Dimasa Kachari/Kacharis from 1911.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
1911			228,528
1921 *	105,364	101,902	207,266
1931	7,439	7,241	14,680
1941			15,971
1951			14,714
1961	36,575	32,143	68,718

\* In 1921 Census (P.99) figures on Dimasa Kachari are not given as such but as Kacharis as a whole, further Kacharis were divided into Hindu and Ammist and the poled value have been presented here.

#### Population of Dimasa Kachari

<i>State/District</i>		<i>Persons</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Assam (Hills)	R	68,405	36,359	32,046
	U	313	216	97
Garo Hills	R	1,309	615	694
	U	11	7	4
U.K. & J. Hills	R	17	14	3
	U	83	69	14
U.M. & N.C. Hills	R	67,069	35,725	31,344
	U	213	140	75
Mizo Hills	R	10	5	5
	U	4	—	4

The table above shows the distribution of the Dimasa Kachari in the State of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and in the different hill districts of Assam.

### Physical Appearance

Endle (1911, p.i) has given a brief outline of the physical characteristics of the Kacharis as such in general, the same is given as follows. "They are certainly not a tall or handsome race and in general appearance bear some resemblance to the Nepali, being as a rule shorter and stouter than the people of the North-west India, though well fitted to bear up against physical fatigue and hardships. In face and figure they show a distinct approximation to what is known as the Mongolian type, *i.e.*, they have square set faces, projecting cheek bones, with almond shaped eyes, and scanty beard and moustache, the last-mentioned being often wanting altogether". The mean stature of Dimasa Kacharis is 163.9 cms.

The Dimasa Kacharis are short to medium statured people. The mean stature of the Dimasa Kacharis is 163.9 and which is close to the mean value of  $1630.5 \pm 5.9$  observed among the Kacharis (c.f. Gupta and Dutta 1966)

Majority of the Dimasa Kacharis are of medium brown colour with low waves in hair form. They have a shallow to medium nasal root with normal wings in most of the cases. As far as the Mongoloid characteristics like epicanthic folds and eye slits are considered, they suggest more of the non-mongoloid features as evidenced from the frequency distribution of those characters.

The appearance of the non-mongoloid features in the Dimasa Kacharis may be due to their mixing in the biological sense with the plains people of Assam through centuries and this might have brought the caucasoid features more to the surface.

They have round to broad faces with prominent chins. Majority of them do not show prognathism and they have medium lips with prominent cheeks.

## *Economic Pursuits*

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### Agriculture

Land is one of the most important economic resources of the people, their livelihood, mainly depend on cultivation. The lands may be classified into the following categories, (1) uncultivable land, (2) cultivable land and (3) land under forest.

The land which are used for homestead purposes, playground, footpaths etc. are included in the non-agricultural lands, uncultivable land Signifies the barren land area which are unfit for cultivation and the land under forest indicates the area which is covered with jungle trees and which is not included in the net areas cultivated. In addition to this there is another type of land known as cultivable but is left fallow for the present time.

The jhum land in a village is restricted to a particular area for a village in consultation with the Sarthe or the 'gaonbora' of a village. If any disagreement arise about selection of the Jhuming site among the villagers, the gaonbora refers the case

Thus all the sons of all the brother's follow the same *Sengfong* while the daughters differ in *jaddi*. Thus patrilineal and matrilineal forms of descent are present among the Dimasa Kacharis. The patri-elan is functionally more important than the matri-elan and the old rules of primary and secondary relationship to the elans is more or less strictly maintained with regard to marriage. Ghosh (1965) reported cases in the village of Hajadisa (Mikir Hills) where the rule of avoiding the patri-clan had been broken in 16 out of total of 44 marriages, while there was not a single case of breach of the rule regarding avoidance of the matri-elan for the same purpose. In all the 16 out of total of 44 marriages, while there was not a single case of breach of the rule regarding avoidance of the matri-elan for the same purpose. In all the 16 cases of the breach of the custom of exogamy the guilty persons were fined and then allowed to remain as husband and wife. But the usual rule as laid by the age old tradition regarding the breach of the custom of exogamy is punishable by excommunication.

In case of the other 4 villages in North Cachar Hills District, no case of breach was observed at all in regard to either the *Sengfong* or the *jaddi*.

Due to their system of residence, the family among the Dimasa can never be extended, either vertically or laterally as the sons become separate from the parents after marriage, thus the family tends to split up. When marriage within the village takes place, it has been found (Ghosh, 1964) that the newly-wed man prefers to build his hut by the side of his wife's but. After marriage a man may live about a year in the wife's house this being known as *minhabba*. But it is found that many people have settled in their wives' villages though they were at liberty to construct houses in their father's village.

The patri-clans and matri-clans among the Dimasa people are widely dispersed. Each clan has its distinctive names; though totem like names are used to designate clans, but totemism in its true sense is not found among the Dimasa Kachari. Thus the objects which have given names to the clan are not regarded as totems, as they are merely names.

There are 42 patri-clans and 42 matri-clans in all. It is said that there were only 7 *Sengfongs* (Ghosh (1965) when Dimapur was the capital of the Kacharis Dingdom. It became 12 in number when the capital was shifted to Maibung, and lastly because 42 at Khaspur. Up to Dimapur period (middle of 16th cent.). There is no evidence of jaddis. According to Dimasa Kacharis the creation of the *jaddis* by the Kachari king in all probability of Maibans, was done to prevent the Kachari men from marrying the women of other Communities like Kuki Naga etc., who were found around the Kachari Kingdom.

The clans have no hierarchial demarcation, all of them (42 *sengfongs* and 42 *Jaddis*) enjoy equal status. Out of these, following 4 *sengfongs* and 4 *jaddis* are called *danga*, that is those who lived near the king and took a leading part in all royal activities.

*Sengfongs* : Riae, Khemprai, Phonglosa, and Seingyung.

*Jaddis* : Mairungma, Saidima, Miungma, and Bangalaima.

**A short List of Sengfongs and Jaddis among the Dimasa Kacharis are given below**

<i>Sengfongs</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Jaddis</i>
1. Naidingsa	Son of Scout	Gachauna
2. Nabingsa	„ „ Angler	Rajama
3. Seingyunsa	„ „ Big sword	Saidima
4. Khempraisa	—	Miungma
5. Adosa	—	Madarma
6. Daudungsa	Son of a kind of Bird	Buguma
7. Maibangsa	Plenty of paddy	Longmaisajilu
8. Keras	—	Anumajilu
9. Parbasa/Girisa	Bill or mountain	
10. Laobangdisa	—	
11. Diphusa	Name of a river	
12. Jrambusa	—	
13. Mitherfansa	—	
14. Baderbagia	—	
15. Monisa	—	
16. Swurungfansa	—	

**Inter-Community Relationship**

The Dimasa Kacharis who are staying in the urban areas may engage in services of barbers, washerman, tailors and shoe makers from other communities, but the Dimasas are far away from the urban centres in the interior villages never allow persons other than their community members. Untouchability is absent and they do not forbid any one who belong to another community to inter-dine with them or take water from the same wells though this is observed only in urban areas or among those who are educated. Inter-marriage with other communities like Burman Kachari, Meeh Kacharies are permissible since they are having the Sengfong and the Jaddis like Dimasa Kacharies.

The tribal ways of the Dimasa Kacharies are still persistent among the people living in the hills than those living in the plains. The Dimasa Kacharies who are surrounded by the Assamese and the Bengali neighbours in the plains and their long experience and steady contact with the plains people has resulted in certain changes in their customs and manners as compared to the Hill Dimasa Kacharies.

Dipali Ghosh (1965) observed that "the Dimasa have recently developed a tendency to conceal the presence of their matri-clans and matrilineal descent of their women from outsiders. Nowadays girls are being sent to school and they are being given the surname of their father (which is that of his Sengfong) as in the case of their Assamese or Bengali classmates."

Marriage is not prohibited between the Burmans of Cachar District and the Hills Dimasa of the North Cachar Hills as both of them observe the rules relating to Sengfong and Jaddi. In contrast to the Dimasa Kachari, the Boro Kachari have no concept of a matri-clan or Jaddi. So no marriage takes place between the Dimasa and Boro.

The dress has also been influenced by their neighbours in so far as the Dimasa Kachari males of the plains or the

educated Dimasa Kacharis are concerned. Most of the males who have come in contact with the plains people have substituted their traditional cloth for dhoti, pants and shirts. While those in the interior hills still retain much of their traditional dress. Most of the people have changed from jhuming to wet cultivation possibly due to the influence of their Assemese or Bengalee neighbours. Even if they are aware of it they are not in a position to follow the wet system due to the condition of the terrain. The Dimasa Kacharies who are living in the urban areas or in the plains are more educated than the hill people, possibly this may not be due to the fact that there is lack of proper facilities in the urban areas rather this may be due to an urge to get educated which may be the effect of their Bengalee and Assamese neighbours, a competitive attitude, which is a healthy sign of a community. Another fact is that the Dimasa Kacharies of the hills are reluctant to accept the change of their social customs, while their brethren in the plains are apt to adopt change according to the needs of the time.

### **Different Segments of the Community**

The people generally known to us as Kacharis, as they call themselves Boro or Bodo (Endle, 1911, p. XV). There were once a very powerful and wide spread race in the whole of Assam. Through the passage of the centuries this large and powerful group of Bodos gradually broke up into a number of segments, in different geographical regions of Assam, and they can only be linked with the common language. According to Endle (1911, p. XVII), no one who has heard members of the five branches of the Bodo race speaks their respective languages can fail to recognize that they belong to the same linguistic group.

The Kachari or Bodo group comprises the following groups within its folds, as based on the account given by Endle (1911) and Gait (1961).



Bara (Kachari)  
Rabha (Totala)  
Meeh (Mes)  
Koeh  
Sonwal Kaehari  
Garo  
Hajong  
Dimasa  
Hojais  
Lalungs

All these tribes are the branches of the great Bodo race. Most of these tribes have been influenced in varying degrees by the venner of Hinduism. Each group is strictly endogamous though there are instances where marriage has taken place among Dimasa Kachari and Burman Kaehari or Meeh Kachari. Such alliances are as a rule not looked upon with favour and they are generally outcasts from the society but peace may set-in by providing feast to the fellow-villagers or by paying the fine imposed by the villaged elders, but even that ease the couple has to stay in the outskirts of the village.

## *Dwelling, Dress and Food Habits*

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The Dimasa Kachari generally reside in the clearing patches of the forest, in the hills and the factors which determine the location of the Dimasa village is the nearness of the cultivating plot and the source of water. In the hills the villages are demarcated not by fencing around but the natural objects like ditch, small streams, or hillocks, which marks the limit of a village. Villages are kept apart from one another in isolated blocks on the foot of the hills nearby a stream or a river for the convenience of cultivation. This is also evidenced from the name of some of the Dimasa villages as Majadisa ; Northdisa ; Nablaidisa ; Didambra. The word *disa* or *di* in the Dimasa language means river. A Kachari village in the hills is much more compact as the houses being built more closely together than their brethren in the plains or the Assamese. Even in a compact village the arrangement of houses are dispersed in such a manner so as to provide space for rearing of livestock and for the kitchen garden for each of the houses. The houses in the Kachari village are not clustered clan-wise (Sengfong-Jaddis) but according to the convenience of the individuals.

In former times the Gaonbora belonging to a particular *sengfong* was generally surrounded by the people on his *sengfong* in the majority thus forming a clustering of a particular *sengfong*. Each house, with its granary and other out buildings, is surrounded by a ditch and fence. The fencing is usually done by *ekra* reeds, jungle grass or split bamboo etc. The ditch, some three or four feet in depth, surrounds the whole homestead and the earth (mud) taken from it is used in erecting a mud wall some 2 or 3 feet in height very close to the dwelling house. But those villages which are having some urban influence have fencing around the house with open spaces in between the fence and the dwelling unit, which is utilized for rearing poultry or for kitchen gardens. Houses are generally large and the shape of the house looks rectangular and the structure as a whole is raised about 2 feet from the ground, supported by stout wooden posts. The whole structure of the house including the side walls is made up of split bamboo finely woven and knitted together so firmly that no plastering of the sort is necessary. But those who are rich or those villagers in the vicinity of the urban areas who can afford this, prepare mud plastered houses.

The roof of the house has slopes on either side thatched with sun-grass (*Shan*, [Bengali ; *Thiri* Dimasa term) which is generally replaced after three or four years, when it gets rotten or damaged by natural processes. The floor of the house is dark except for the scanty light that creeps in through the openings in the split bamboo wall. Generally, there is no window or chimney, the main door and the tiny slits in the bamboo walls serve as source of ventilation. The houses are of rectangular type varying in length from 35—45' and with breadth of about 20' and is usually divided into two rooms by a partition. The outer room is called *Nokhung* and inner room is called *Noshing*. The outer *Nokhung* is used by the males of the household and is also meant for the outsiders or guest. There are only two doors, one connecting *Nokhung* to the outside which serves as the entrance to the house and the other door connects *Nokhung* with *Noshing* which is meant for the family. The hearth is placed at one corner of *Noshing* almost

touching the side wall. The household equipment is generally kept in the inner room.

Given below is a list of household equipment of a Dimasa Kachari house :—

<i>Bengali</i>	<i>Dimasa Kachari</i>
Kalshi	Damsura
	Dik
Kalshi (earthen)	Ara
Thala	Kopra
Hatha	Khuku
Bati (of Bell metal)	Bela
Bamboo Pipe for strong water	Diphong
Axe	Rowa
Small stool	
Bamboo baskets	Khamplai
Clothes	Zapsi
Cereals	Maikho

It may be noted that the people from other Sengfong are not allowed to touch the Maikho. Almost all the households equipment are of brass or bell metal and are made by the Bengali smiths, which may be obtained from the nearby market.

Household goods are of simple variety meant for the purpose of utility rather than for decoration. There are baskets of various shapes and sizes and bearing different uses. They are generally used storing cereals, clothes and other articles of daily use. Bamboo pipe each with a node on one end and an opening on the other are used for carrying water and for storing spices.

### **Dress**

The dress of both males and females is simple. The males commonly put on short Dhoti (Gamcha) and shirts, particularly

those who are residing near by the urban areas. In the interior villages the upper part of the body is convened by a rectangular sheet of cloth like *Gamcha* called *Rimchau* and is worn like a which cross belt, the border of which is embroidered in various colours.

The Dhoti (Gainthou) is short and is wrapped round the loin unlike the Bangalees-Assamese. The males sometime wear a turban (Sidaupha) more so in festive occasions which generally has a length of about 20 arm-lengths or about 7 yards and in width about a yard in length. Boys generally put on shirts and pants instead of Dhoti particularly those who are living near the urban centres. Those who are living in town almost always wear the European dress which has become the fashion of the day. Women put on a short petticoat called *Righ* fastened around the waist by means of a belt made of cotton cloth. Another cloth known as *Rizamphain* is used to cover the upper part of the body which is tied under the arms and is drawn tight over the breast. Over and above them clothes is placed *Rikhausa* a sort of veil which covers the head and the face and is hung on either side of the shoulder covering the breast. But this is not generally in use except in marriage and other religious ceremonies. Their ceremonial dress is similar to the types described earlier except that they are multicoloured and looks gorgeous.

Women generally keep long hair, and tie it in a knob behind the head. Males cut their hair short and seldom care to comb. They comb hair with their fingers which usually perform the functions of the comb. Though the Dimasas staying in the urban areas or those who have experience of the urban life or influenced by the plains people like Assamese or Bengalis cut their hair in the fashion of the plains people. Nails are trimmed with a knife and the teeth are cleaned with a piece of jungle tree or sometimes only with the fingers along with some tooth powder if available; while those who are staying in the urban areas and are enlightened, use tooth paste for cleaning the teeth.

Footwear is seldom used both among the males and females particularly in the villages away from the urban centres

The Dimasas who are living in the urban centres, particularly those who are office goers use modern footwear.

On ceremonial occasions both males and females will generally put on their traditional dress except in a few cases, especially among the youths who are much influenced by the urban ways of life. The priest or Hojai, put on the common dress i.e., *Gainthou* or *Rimchau* and the turban *Sidaupha*, these are the common dress put on by the priest but they are always worn clean that is which are not used earlier on ordinary occasions and are set apart for only ceremonial purposes. Those who can afford to put on a new dress, do so.

The Dimasa Kacharis are very fond of ornaments. Women of prepubertal age put on a nose ring (*Khamauthai*) and necklace of beads shells (*Lick*). *Rangbarsa* is another necklace made of silver beads which are matched with Pearl beads. The thread is also made of silver.

Women of post-pubertal age wear *Khadu* in hand which is made up of pure silver and is fairly heavy and weighs up to 15-20 totals. *Khadu* is also worn in anklets but it slightly varies from that worn in hand in that it remains open at one side instead of forming a complete ring.

Ornaments are rarely worn by men even in the interior villages. In earlier times men used to wear an ear ring of copper called *Khirik*. As no ear ornaments are worn by the males so there is no ear-piercing ceremony. No tatooing is done among the Dimasa Kacharis.

## Food

Their staple food is rice and they eat all kinds of meat with the exception of the beef. The following type of rice is generally taken by the Dimasas as—*Maisa*—common rice (*Maima* and *Maisa*—larger and smaller grains); *maizu*—used for the preparation of *Zu*; *Bairing*—a special variety known as '*Biron chaul*' in Bengalis.

Meat is taken either roasted or cooked or after it is thoroughly dried in the sun. Dry fish is mostly preferable which they store in small baskets. The following are the common vegetables and fruits which they usually take—sweet pumpkin, corn, gourd, snake gourd and different types of vegetable leaves. Curry is prepared using *Khar* (Soda) and oil. Only mustard oil is used. *Naphalam* is an indigenous product and is prepared from a fish (Punti in Bengali) and mixed with *Khar*, salt and chilly, and is kept for 2 or 3 months. According to them it is very nourishing and is almost always taken along with the rice. There is, however, one common article of food, which no orthodox old fashioned Kachari will ever touch, *i.e.*, milk. Usually no cows are found in the village as they consider them to be an unclean animal. But presently this prejudice against the use of milk seems to be passing away.

All the members of the family eat together in the same house. Meal is generally taken three times day, in the morning in the afternoon and in the evening. Rice, beer or 'Zou' is their favourite drink and figures prominently in the observance of their ceremonies and festivals. Outsiders and strangers are also offered with this for the sake of courtesy.

An essential ingredient in the preparation of this most popular form of refreshment is the condiment known as *emao* which is usually composed of at least three or four distinct elements. To a definite proportion of (1) husked rice is added (2) the jack-tree leaf and Dhetai (a jungle plant) (3) another jungle plant-poison fern. All these ingredients are vigorously pounded together into a powder which is then sieved for at least two times. The powder so prepared is then mixed with water and is made into a paste, these are then left for drying for some weeks and are made into small discs after that they are kept covered for the same time by the rice straw. They are then exposed in the hot sun for another four or five days, so as to become thoroughly dry. Finally they are kept suspended over a fire place in an earthenware water-vessel and from there they are taken out when required for. The adult people smoke and consume betel with *Aracca*-nut, the latter is more common and is consumed by both the sexes.

## Recording of Time

The Dimasas generally record the end of the night with the cock's crow. In the interior villages the time or the period after day is known by the position of the sun or when going on a journey the time is generally recorded by the time taken for the eating of a piece of betel nut which generally takes fifteen minutes for each place. The periods of the day and night are as follows :

Dawn	Naiju
Morning	Phoron
Ascending Sun (9th 10 am)	Saindaphuba
Midday	Sainjev
Descending Sun (1-to 4 p.m)	Sainjerkheraba
Evening (5-6 pm)	Sainblee
Dusk (6-8 pm)	Sarifon
Night	Flar
Midnight to Dawn	Hakjer

## Measure of Weight

The recording of space and weight by the Kachari is done according to their Bengalee or Assamese neighbours. The use of Seers, Feet etc. are common even in the interior villages. The type of weights and measures used before the pre-British days could not be ascertained but all are of the opinion that they used some different types of measures other than what they are presently using, as for example, in some of the interior villages even now they are using the unit—'mai'.

1 Mai=4 Seer (approximately)

Measured by means of a bamboo basket 12 Mai=1 Bân (48 Seers)



## *Environmental Sanitation And Recreation*

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### **Sanitation**

Dimasa Kacharis Villages are not compact, because they build their homes on the foot of the hill, on a large open space. Almost every Dimasa Kachari house is having space for the sizes of the domestic animal and for homestead gardens. Generally pigs, goats, poultry are kept in a separate enclosure adjacent to the main house. Those who are rich and can afford, build the sheds for the domestic animal a little away but within the boundary of the individual house. Owing to the keeping of their domestic animals very close to their houses, and as rubbish is thrown all around the areas surrounding the home, it always remains very dirty and smelly. As there is no common place for throwing the rubbish so it gets accumulated all around and the pigs and dogs act as Scavengers. Although this makes the whole atmosphere foul smelling, the people are used to such things and they seem not to be bothered by this, thus sanitation in the real sense of the term is totally absent in the villages. There is no drainage system and foul water finds its way to the village streets. Sometimes such drain

water accumulates in the ditch and serves as the bathing pool for the domesticated animals.

There is no lavatory or latrine and the nearby jungle offers a good place for this, and where dogs and pigs would swarm for their food and serve as scavengers. The Dimasa Kacharis who are living in the rural areas are having lavatory or latrine at one corner of their house away from the main rooms. The village people generally do not care to clean their clothes, but only doing this on festive occasions while those who are rich usually take to new clothing. The common people who are having urban influence wash their clothes with soaps. But the poorer sections put on the same clothes every day until it is in such a condition that it cannot be worn by the person any more due to its torn nature. In any case, even the poorer section of the Dimasa Kachari apparently looks much cleaner than their neighbours the Semis and the Mikirs. They clean their face and feet and soothe away their fatigue and weariness at the nearby stream or well while coming from their hard days work in the fields.

Cooking utensils and dishes are washed after every meal. There houses are dark and one cannot see what is inside unless he is accustomed to the darkness. Doorways and in some cases windows or the opening in the walls serve as source of ventilation and as there is no chimney the smoke hovers like a cloud in the ceiling of the house until it is forced out of the wind through some opening.

The common diseases are dysentery, boils, malaria, and other skin diseases. Some of the Dimasa Kachari names for the common diseases are as follows :

Small Pox	—	Linthai
Cholera	—	Murkhi
Ordinary		
Fever	—	Limba
Dysentery	—	Kamri

In the villages far away from the urban centres, they do not rely much on the modern medicine, but rely on their indigenous medical herbs with which they treat all kinds of diseases, which they can diagnose. There is no particular medicine man but the old and experienced person gives medicine some times voluntarily to the diseased person. The villages near the urban centres are using the modern medicines and are getting all the modern medical facilities in the Municipal hospitals, while in the interior villages, where facilities of the modern medicine are not available, they use the indigenous medicine and worship and propitiate the god Madaikho. The proporation is done by Hojai and the family has simply to bring the materials for the desired propitiation.

### **Recreation**

The Dimas Kacharies who are staying in the villages and are agriculturists, work in their fields from morning until evening and relax themselves only after coming from the fields. The men and women sit around the hearth snapping stories and gossiping about the fields and crops and the prospects of the coming harvest, thus removing the fatigue due to the days work. When they meet with friends and relatives the inevitable subject of crops always comes up for discussion amongst them apart from some family matters or other matters. Some time they sing in chorus while working in the fields or sing simple melodies while thrashing the crops, which seems to dispel the fatigue due to the hard labour and weariness from the body and mind. Though they have to undergo through the rigours of nature which makes their life hard, yet their hearts are full with hope and joy and they are satisfied with what they have. They are the children of the nature and find music in the winds, streams and woods which fill their mind with much delight.

### **Games**

The little boys and girls in the Village do not play any specific game, to them, games are like climbing trees, or throwing stones, or other similar activities with which they remain

engaged and thus spend the day until feel tired and go to their homes. The grown up boys and girls play some of the modern games borrowed from outside, generally learned through the school mates or from the plains people. Hide and seek is played generally by girls. Football is a favourite game among the boys especially those who are staying in the urban areas. Sometimes teams are formed among themselves for friendly matches for a tournament in a competition. Indoor games like carrom, ludo, and cards etc. are also played by both young and old. Those who have received some education read newspapers, story books etc. or sometime listen to the radio or transistor if available, in a neighbour's home or if possessed by them.

The housewives and elderly women are hard pressed with their household chores such as fetching water, cooking, cleaning and washing etc. and whatever little time they get to spare as leisure time they spend in gossiping or visiting friends and relatives. The young men frequently go during their leisure time for shooting some wild game or fishing in the nearby ponds. The village young men particularly those who are staying in the interior villages generally spend their leisure time in dancing or singing or playing on the drums or discuss problems which they come across in their day-to-day life and exchange their experiences.

## *Language and Literature*

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The Dimasa Kacharis speak the Kachari language, which is followed by the other sections of the Kacharis like Barman Kachari, Mech Kachari, Sanwal Kachari etc. Sir George Grierson (Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. III, Part II) classed the Kachari language in the Naga-Bodo group. In 1921 Census there were 259,587 Bodo, Mech and Plains Kachari speakers, (p. 58) while Dimas speakers (p. 59) were 11,040 persons of which 5519 were males and 5,521 were females. In 1931 Census (p. 228-229) Bara, Bodo or Plains Kacharies were 282,582 of which 143,544 were males and 139,038 were females. While the Dimasa of Hill Kacharis numbered 14680 of which 7439 persons were males and 7241 were females.

The total number of Dimasa Kacharis who have stated their mother-tongue as Dimasa Kachari is given below:

(Census of India: Assam: Vol. III, Part V.A., pp. 370-381).

## Total Speakers

<i>Tribe</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Mother Tongue</i>
Dimasa	2,323	1,920	Assamese
Kachari	6,641	5,460	Bangali
	31	61	Bodo/Boro
	10,874	9,490	Dimasa
	—	45	Garó
	6	—	Haijong/Haijong
	8,604	7,482	Kachari
	8,087	7,683	Mikir
	1	1	Naga-Unspecified
	8	—	Rabha

The table above shows that the Dimasa Kacharis who had reported Dimasa to be their mother-tongue are maximum in number, the next in descending order comes Kachari and Mikirs respectively. Thus it is evident that the Dimasa Kachari have reported different languages as their mother-tongues. Majority of the Dimasa Kacharies belong to the Dimasa, Kachari, Mikir Bengale and Assamese language group.

There are a few publications like magazines and books in the Dimasa language with the Bengali script. Some of them are translations of famous Bengali books like Naukabilas.

A list of the few books are given as follows :

1. Jamiyani Rajthai
2. Malsokhruni Malsothsothai Ranghha Dihahaihe
3. Dimasa

The literacy percentage of Dimasa Kachari is 8.89% while the literacy percentage of Dimasa Kachari is 29.57% percent among the Scheduled Tribes of Assam and 0.66% when the total population of the state is taken.

called, Habson, *i.e.*, the place above the earth. And people who have done good deeds during their life are able to go to Dambra or the heaven.

When a person dies the relatives of the deceased inform close friends and relatives, who flock to the house of the deceased. The ceremony starts with the killing of a fowl. The dead body is then washed and dressed in clean clothes by any elderly man or woman of the family depending on the sex of the deceased and then the body is put on a mat on the floor. The dead body is placed to lie flat with the head towards the west. Then the friends and relatives who have flocked to the deceased house console and sympathize the bereaved family and pay their last respect to the deceased person by placing a gift like a piece of cloth or money by the side of the dead body, depending on the ability of the person. When all the guests have seen the dead body it is taken on a bier (*doli*) to the cremation ground (*mankulungling*) which is generally situated on the bank of a river or stream. Seven layers of dried wood are raised to form the funeral pyre (*thairik*) and over this pyre the corpse is placed and fire is lighted by a male relative of the father's side. In case the body does not burn well it is stated that the cause is due to the absence of some relative or friend. In such cases any of the male relatives standing there throws some grass and states the reason of the relative's absence. This practice is known as 'dohongsuba' (throwing sungrass) which is usually done when two thirds of the body is burnt. When the body has been thoroughly burnt the bones and ashes are collected and thrown into the nearby stream except the frontal bone (*tain*) which is retained and placed in the memorial house (*Mangkilong*) which is erected on the cremation ground preferably on the spot of cremation ground preferably on the spot of cremation. The structure is made of bamboo and looks like a small temple. The bone so placed in *Mangklong* is allowed to remain there until the *shradha* ceremony takes place. The date of the 'shradha' ceremony is set by the relatives, which must be over before the harvest or the Bihu festival. Until the 'Shradha' ceremony (*maimutharba*) is over the family is

## *Life Cycle and Beliefs*

considered to be in mourning and throughout the period meal has to be offered after the name of the deceased person at Mangklong or if the structure has not been erected then the meal to the deceased person may be given in the house on a plaintain leaf. On maimutharba ceremony the memorial house a Mangklong is burnt and friends and relatives who took part in the cremation of the dead body are given a feast. On this occasion only rice beer is served. Burning of the Mangklong is performed on the day set for 'shradha'. While returning from the cremation ground every individual has to dip their big toe in a half open bamboo pipe where water is kept. 'Shradha' is usually held with great pomp and the ceremony lasts for two days. Animals like pigs and fowl are killed and rice beer is prepared and all these are served to the invitees. Thus with the end of the shradh the death ceremony or the purification ceremony is over.

On the death of the husband, a wife takes off all her ornaments and remains in mourning, until the next harvest festival. For the first three days after death she is not allowed to take rice. Similarly, on the death of one's wife, a widower remains in mourning until the harvest festival. On the death of parents, children are not allowed to eat until the following night. During the period of mourning neither widow nor widower can remarry.



## *Family, Clan, Kinship and Inter-Community Relationship*

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### **Family**

The Dimasa Kaehari family is ordinarily of simple type, that is a nuclear family consisting of husband, wife and unmarried children. The system of residence can hardly be called patrilocal (Ghosh : 1964) as the husband often settles in his wife's village after marriage. This tradition has been operative from olden times, as it is found that out of ten inter-village marriages (Ghosh : 1964) which took place from the age-group of 40-60 years., five bridegrooms whose parents have already died, frequently prefers to live in his wife's place. When an inter-village marriage takes place and if the man decides to shift to his wife's village, he first lives with his mother until he can build a new house of his own. When marriage within the village, takes place, the newly wed man prefers to build his hut by the side of his wife's father's hut.

The family type among the Dimasa Kaeharis is usually composed of the parents and their unmarried children. Thus

Thus all the sons of all the brother's follow the same *Sengfong* while the daughters differ in *jaddi*. Thus patrilineal and matrilineal forms of descent are present among the Dimasa Kacharis. The patri-clan is functionally more important than the matri-clan and the old rules of primary and secondary relationship to the clans is more or less strictly maintained with regard to marriage. Ghosh (1965) reported cases in the village of Hajadisa (Mikir Hills) where the rule of avoiding the patri-clan had been broken in 16 out of total of 44 marriages, while there was not a single case of breach of the rule regarding avoidance of the matri-clan for the same purpose. In all the 16 out of total of 44 marriages, while there was not a single case of breach of the rule regarding avoidance of the matri-clan for the same purpose. In all the 16 cases of the breach of the custom of exogamy the guilty persons were found and then allowed to remain as husband and wife. But the usual rule as laid by the age old tradition regarding the breach of the custom of exogamy is punishable by excommunication.

In case of the other 4 villages in North Cachar Hills District, no case of breach was observed at all in regard to either the *Sengfong* or the *jaddi*.

Due to their system of residence, the family among the Dimasa can never be extended, either vertically or laterally as the sons become separate from the parents after marriage, thus the family tends to split up. When marriage within the village takes place, it has been found (Ghosh, 1964) that the newly-wed man prefers to build his hut by the side of his wife's but. After marriage a man may live about a year in the wife's house this being known as *minhabba*. But it is found that many people have settled in their wives' villages though they were at liberty to construct houses in their father's village.

The patri-clans and matri-clans among the Dimasa people are widely dispersed. Each clan has its distinctive names; though totem like names are used to designate clans, but totemism in its true sense is not found among the Dimasa Kachari. Thus the objects which have given names to the clan are not regarded as totems, as they are merely names.

There are 42 patri-clans and 42 matri-clans in all. It is said that there were only 7 *Sengfongs* (Ghosh (1965) when Dimapur was the capital of the Kacharis Dngdom. It became 12 in number when the capital was shifted to Maibung, and lastly because 42 at Khaspur. Up to Dimapur period (middle of 16th cent.). There is no evidence of jaddis. According to Dimasa Kacharis the creation of the *jaddis* by the Kachari king in all probability of Maibans, was done to prevent the Kachari men from marrying the women of other Communities like Kuki Naga etc., who were found around the Kachari Kingdom.

The clans have no hierarchial demarcation, all of them (42 sengfongs and 42 Jaddis) enjoy equal status. Out of these, following 4 sengfongs and 4 jaddis are called *danga*, that is those who lived near the king and took a leading part in all royal activities.

*Sengfongs* : Riae, Khemprai, Phonglosa, and Seingyung.

*Jaddis* : Mairungma, Saidima, Miungma, and Bangalaima.

A short List of Sengfongs and Jaddis among the  
Dimasa Kacharis are given below

<i>Sengfongs</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Jaddis</i>
1. Naidingsa	Son of Scout	Gachauna
2. Nabingsa	„ „ Angler	Rajama
3. Seingyuns	„ „ Big sword	Saidima
4. Khemprais	—	Miungma
5. Adosa	—	Madarma
6. Daudungsa	Son of a kind of Bird	Buguma
7. Maibangsa	Plenty of paddy	Longmaisajilu
8. Keras	—	Anumajilu
9. Parbasa/Girisa	Bill or mountain	
10. Laobangdisa	—	
11. Diphusa	Name of a river	
12. Jrambusa	—	
13. Mitherfansa	—	
14. Baderbagia	—	
15. Monisa	—	
16. Swurungfansa	—	

### **Inter-Community Relationship**

The Dimasa Kacharis who are staying in the urban areas may engage in services of barbers, washerman, tailors and shoe makers from other communities, but the Dimasas are far away from the urban centres in the interior villages never allow persons other than their community members. Untouchability is absent and they do not forbid any one who belong to another community to inter-dine with them or take water from the same wells though this is observed only in urban areas or among those who are educated. Inter-marriage with other communities like Burman Kachari, Mech Kacharies are permissible since they are having the Sengfong and the Jaddis like Dimasa Kacharies.

The tribal ways of the Dimasa Kacharies are still persistent among the people living in the hills than those living in the plains. The Dimasa Kacharies who are surrounded by the Assamese and the Bengali neighbours in the plains and their long experience and steady contact with the plains people has resulted in certain changes in their customs and manners as compared to the Hill Dimasa Kacharies.

Dipali Ghosh (1965) observed that "the Dimasa have recently developed a tendency to conceal the presence of their matri-clans and matrilineal descent of their women from outsiders. Nowadays girls are being sent to school and they are being given the surname of their father (which is that of his Sengfong) as in the case of their Assamese or Bengali classmates."

Marriage is not prohibited between the Burmans of Cachar District and the Hills Dimasa of the North Cachar Hills as both of them observe the rules relating to Sengfong and Jaddi. In contrast to the Dimasa Kachari, the Boro Kachari have no concept of a matri-clan or Jaddi. So no marriage takes place between the Dimasa and Boro.

The dress has also been influenced by their neighbours in so far as the Dimasa Kachari males of the plains or the

educated Dimasa Kacharis are concerned. Most of the males who have come in contact with the plains people have substituted their traditional cloth for dhoti, pants and shirts. While those in the interior hills still retain much of their traditional dress. Most of the people have changed from jhuming to wet cultivation possibly due to the influence of their Asamese or Bengalee neighbours. Even if they are aware of it they are not in a position to follow the wet system due to the condition of the terrain. The Dimasa Kacharies who are living in the urban areas or in the plains are more educated than the hill people, possibly this may not be due to the fact that there is lack of proper facilities in the urban areas rather this may be due to an urge to get educated which may be the effect of their Bengalee and Assamese neighbours, a competitive attitude, which is a healthy sign of a community. Another fact is that the Dimasa Kacharies of the hills are reluctant to accept the change of their social customs, while their brethren in the plains are apt to adopt change according to the needs of the time.

### **Different Segments of the Community**

The people generally known to us as Kacharis, as they call themselves Boro or Bodo (Endle, 1911, p. XV). There were once a very powerful and wide spread race in the whole of Assam. Through the passage of the centuries this large and powerful group of Bodos gradually broke up into a number of segments, in different geographical regions of Assam, and they can only be linked with the common language. According to Endle (1911, p. XVII), no one who has heard members of the five branches of the Bodo race speaks their respective languages can fail to recognize that they belong to the same linguistic group.

The Kachari or Bodo group comprises the following groups within its folds, as based on the account given by Endle (1911) and Gait (1961).

Bara (Kachari)  
Rabha (Totala)  
Mech (Mes)  
Koch  
Sonwal Kachari  
Garo  
Hajong  
Dimasa  
Hojais  
Lalungs

All these tribes are the branches of the great Bodo race. Most of these tribes have been influenced in varying degrees by the venner of Hinduism. Each group is strictly endogamous though there are instances where marriage has taken place among Dimasa Kachari and Burman Kachari or Mech Kachari. Such alliances are as a rule not looked upon with favour and they are generally outcasts from the society but peace may set-in by providing feast to the fellow-villagers or by paying the fine imposed by the villaged elders, but even that case the couple has to stay in the outskirts of the village.

## *Dwelling, Dress and Food Habits*

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The Dimasa Kachari generally reside in the clearing patches of the forest, in the hills and the factors which determine the location of the Dimasa village is the nearness of the cultivating plot and the source of water. In the hills the villages are demarcated not by fencing around but the natural objects like ditch, small streams, or hillocks, which marks the limit of a village. Villages are kept apart from one another in isolated blocks on the foot of the hills nearby a stream or a river for the convenience of cultivation. This is also evidenced from the name of some of the Dimasa villages as Majadisa ; Northdisa ; Nablaidisa ; Didambra. The word *disa* or *di* in the Dimasa language means river. A Kachari village in the hills is much more compact as the houses being built more closely together than their brethren in the plains or the Assamese. Even in a compact village the arrangement of houses are dispersed in such a manner so as to provide space for rearing of livestocks and for the kitchen garden for each of the houses. The houses in the Kachari village are not clustered clan-wise (Sengfong-Jaddis) but according to the convenience of the individuals.

In former times the Gaonbora belonging to a particular *sengfong* was generally surrounded by the people on his *sengfong* in the majority thus forming a clustering of a particular *sengfong*. Each house, with its granary and other out buildings, is surrounded by a ditch and fence. The fencing is usually done by *ekra* reeds, jungle grass or split bamboo etc. The ditch, some three or four feet in depth, surrounds the whole homestead and the earth (mud) taken from it is used in erecting a mud wall some 2 or 3 feet in height very close to the dwelling house. But those villages which are having some urban influence have fencing around the house with open spaces in between the fence and the dwelling unit, which is utilized for rearing poultry or for kitchen gardens. Houses are generally large and the shape of the house looks rectangular and the structure as a whole is raised about 2 feet from the ground, supported by stout wooden posts. The whole structure of the house including the side walls is made up of split bamboo finely woven and knitted together so firmly that no plastering of the sort is necessary. But those who are rich or those villagers in the vicinity of the urban areas who can afford this, prepare mud plastered houses.

The roof of the house has slopes on either side thatched with sun-grass (*Shan*, [Bengali ; *Thiri* Dimasa term) which is generally replaced after three or four years, when it gets rotten or damaged by natural processes. The floor of the house is dark except for the scanty light that creeps in through the openings in the split bamboo wall. Generally, there is no window or chimney, the main door and the tiny slits in the bamboo walls serve as source of ventilation. The houses are of rectangular type varying in length from 35—45' and with breadth of about 20' and is usually divided into two rooms by a partition. The outer room is called *Nokhung* and inner room is called *Noshing*. The outer *Nokhung* is used by the males of the household and is also meant for the outsiders or guest. There are only two doors, one connecting *Nokhung* to the outside which serves as the entrance to the house and the other door connects *Nokhung* with *Noshing* which is meant for the family. The hearth is placed at one corner of *Noshing* almost



touching the side wall. The household equipment is generally kept in the inner room.

Given below is a list of household equipment of a Dimasa Kachari house :—

<i>Bengali</i>	<i>Dimasa Kachari</i>
Kalshi	Damsura
	Dik
Kalshi (earthen)	Ara
Thala	Kopra
Hatha	Khuku
Bati (of Bell metal)	Bela
Bamboo Pipe for strong water	Diphong
Axe	Rowa
Small stool	
Bamboo baskets	Khamplai
Clothes	Zapsi
Cereals	Maikho

It may be noted that the people from other Sengfong are not allowed to touch the Maikho. Almost all the households equipment are of brass or bell metal and are made by the Bengali smiths, which may be obtained from the nearby market.

Household goods are of simple variety meant for the purpose of utility rather than for decoration. There are baskets of various shapes and sizes and bearing different uses. They are generally used storing cereals, clothes and other articles of daily use. Bamboo pipe each with a node on one end and an opening on the other are used for carrying water and for storing spices.

### **Dress**

The dress of both males and females is simple. The males commonly put on short Dhoti (Gamcha) and shirts, particularly

those who are residing near by the urban areas. In the interior villages the upper part of the body is convened by a rectangular sheet of cloth like *Gamcha* called *Rimchau* and is worn like a which cross belt, the border of which is embroidered in various colours.

The Dhوتي (Gainthou) is short and is wrapped round the loin unlike the Bangalees-Assamese. The males sometime wear a turban (Sidaupha) more so in festive occasions which generally has a length of about 20 arm-lengths or about 7 yards and in width about a yard in length. Boys generally put on shirts and pants instead of Dhوتي particularly those who are living near the urban centres. Those who are living in town almost always wear the European dress which has become the fashion of the day. Women put on a short petticoat called *Righ* fastened around the waist by means of a belt made of cotton cloth. Another cloth known as *Rizamphain* is used to cover the upper part of the body which is tied under the arms and is drawn tight over the breast. Over and above them clothes is placed *Rikhausa* a sort of veil which covers the head and the face and is hung on either side of the shoulder covering the breast. But this is not generally in use except in marriage and other religious ceremonies. Their ceremonial dress is similar to the types described earlier except that they are multicoloured and looks gorgeous.

Women generally keep long hair, and tie it in a knob behind the head. Males cut their hair short and seldom care to comb. They comb hair with their fingers which usually perform the functions of the comb. Though the Dimasas staying in the urban areas or those who have experience of the urban life or influenced by the plains people like Assamese or Bengalis cut their hair in the fashion of the plains people. Nails are trimmed with a knife and the teeth are cleaned with a piece of jungle tree or sometimes only with the fingers along with some tooth powder if available ; while those who are staying in the urban areas and are enlightened, use tooth paste for cleaning the teeth.

Footwear is seldom used both among the males and females particularly in the villages away from the urban centres

The Dimasas who are living in the urban centres, particularly those who are office goers use modern footwear.

On ceremonial occasions both males and females will generally put on their traditional dress except in a few cases, especially among the youths who are much influenced by the urban ways of life. The priest or Hojai, put on the common dress i.e., *Gainthou* or *Rimchau* and the turban *Sidaupha*, these are the common dress put on by the priest but they are always worn clean that is which are not used earlier on ordinary occasions and are set apart for only ceremonial purposes. Those who can afford to put on a new dress, do so.

The Dimasa Kacharis are very fond of ornaments. Women of prepubertal age put on a nose ring (*Khamauthai*) and necklace of beads shells (*Lick*). *Rangbarsa* is another necklace made of silver beads which are matched with Pearl beads. The thread is also made of silver.

Women of post-pubertal age wear *Khadu* in hand which is made up of pure silver and is fairly heavy and weighs up to 15-20 totals. *Khadu* is also worn in anklets but it slightly varies from that worn in hand in that it remains open at one side instead of forming a complete ring.

Ornaments are rarely worn by men even in the interior villages. In earlier times men used to wear an ear ring of copper called *Kliirik*. As no ear ornaments are worn by the males so there is no ear-piercing ceremony. No tatooing is done among the Dimasa Kacharis.

## Food

Their staple food is rice and they eat all kinds of meat with the exception of the beef. The following type of rice is generally taken by the Dimasas as—*Maisa*—common rice (*Maima* and *Maisa*—larger and smaller grains); *maizu*—used for the preparation of *Zu*; *Bairing*—a special variety known as '*Biron chaul*' in Bengalis.

Meat is taken either roasted or cooked or after it is thoroughly dried in the sun. Dry fish is mostly preferable which they store in small baskets. The following are the common vegetables and fruits which they usually take—sweet pumpkin, corn, gourd, snake gourd and different types of vegetable leaves. Curry is prepared using *Khar* (Soda) and oil. Only mustard oil is used. *Naphalam* is an indigenous product and is prepared from a fish (Punti in Bengali) and mixed with *Khar*, salt and chilly, and is kept for 2 or 3 months. According to them it is very nourishing and is almost always taken along with the rice. There is, however, one common article of food, which no orthodox old fashioned Kachari will ever touch, *i.e.*, milk. Usually no cows are found in the village as they consider them to be an unclean animal. But presently this prejudice against the use of milk seems to be passing away.

All the members of the family eat together in the same house. Meal is generally taken three times day, in the morning in the afternoon and in the evening. Rice, beer or 'Zou' is their favourite drink and figures prominently in the observance of their ceremonies and festivals. Outsiders and strangers are also offered with this for the sake of courtesy.

An essential ingredient in the preparation of this most popular form of refreshment is the condiment known as *emao* which is usually composed of at least three or four distinct elements. To a definite proportion of (1) husked rice is added (2) the jack-tree leaf and Dhetai (a jungle plant) (3) another jungle plant-poison fern. All these ingredients are vigorously pounded together into a powder which is then sieved for at least two times. The powder so prepared is then mixed with water and is made into a paste, these are then left for drying for some weeks and are made into small discs after that they are kept covered for the some time by the rice straw. They are then exposed in the hot sun for another four or five days, so as to become thoroughly dry. Finally they are kept suspended over a fire place in an earthenware water-vessel and from there they are taken out when required for. The adult people smoke and consume betel with *arcca-nut*, the latter is more common and is consumed by both the sexes.

### Recording of Time

The Dimasas generally record the end of the night with the cock's crow. In the interior villages the time or the period after day is known by the position of the sun or when going on a journey the time is generally recorded by the time taken for the eating of a piece of betel nut which generally takes fifteen minutes for each place. The periods of the day and night are as follows :

Dawn	Naiju
Morning	Phoron
Ascending Sun (9th 10 am)	Saindaphuba
Midday	Sainjev
Descending Sun (1-to 4 p.m)	Sainjerkheraba
Evening (5-6 pm)	Sainblee
Dusk (6-8 pm)	Sarifon
Night	Flar
Midnight to Dawn	Hakjer

### Measure of Weight

The recording of space and weight by the Kachari is done according to their Bengalee or Assamese neighbours. The use of Seers, Feet etc. are common even in the interior villages. The type of weights and measures used before the pre-British days could not be ascertained but all are of the opinion that they used some different types of measures other than what they are presently using, as for example, in some of the interior villages even now they are using the unit—'mai'.

1 Mai=4 Seer (approximately)

Measured by means of a bamboo basket 12 Mai=1 Bain  
(48 Seers)

## *Environmental Sanitation And Recreation*

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### **Sanitation**

Dimasa Kacharis Villages are not compact, because they build their homes on the foot of the hill, on a large open space. Almost every Dimasa Kachari house is having space for the sizes of the domestic animal and for homestead gardens. Generally pigs, goats, poultry are kept in a separate enclosure adjacent to the main house. Those who are rich and can afford, build the sheds for the domestic animal a little away but within the boundary of the individual house. Owing to the keeping of their domestic animals very close to their houses, and as rubbish is thrown all around the areas surrounding the home, it always remains very dirty and smelly. As there is no common place for throwing the rubbish so it gets accumulated all around and the pigs and dogs act as Scavengers. Although this makes the whole atmosphere foul smelling, the people are used to such things and they seem not to be bothered by this, thus sanitation in the real sense of the term is totally absent in the villages. There is no drainage system and foul water finds its way to the village streets. Sometimes such drain

water accumulates in the ditch and serves as the bathing pool for the domesticated animals.

There is no lavatory or latrine and the nearby jungle offers a good place for this, and where dogs and pigs would swarm for their food and serve as scavengers. The Dimasa Kacharis who are living in the rural areas are having lavatory or latrine at one corner of their house away from the main rooms. The village people generally do not care to clean their clothes, but only doing this on festive occasions while those who are rich usually take to new clothing. The common people who are having urban influence wash their clothes with soaps. But the poorer sections put on the same clothes every day until it is in such a condition that it cannot be worn by the person any more due to its torn nature. In any case, even the poorer section of the Dimasa Kachari apparently looks much cleaner than their neighbours the Semis and the Mikirs. They clean their face and feet and soothe away their fatigue and weariness at the nearby stream or well while coming from their hard days work in the fields.

Cooking utensils and dishes are washed after every meal. There houses are dark and one cannot see what is inside unless he is accustomed to the darkness. Doorways and in some cases windows or the opening in the walls serve as source of ventilation and as there is no chimney the smoke hovers like a cloud in the ceiling of the house until it is forced out of the wind through some opening.

The common diseases are dysentery, boils, malaria, and other skin diseases. Some of the Dimasa Kachari names for the common diseases are as follows :

Small Pox	—	Linthai
Cholera	—	Murkhi
Ordinary Fever	—	Limba
Dysentery	—	Kamri

In the villages far away from the urban centres, they do not rely much on the modern medicine, but rely on their indigenous medical herbs with which they treat all kinds of diseases, which they can diagnose. There is no particular medicine man but the old and experienced person gives medicine some times voluntarily to the diseased person. The villages near the urban centres are using the modern medicines and are getting all the modern medical facilities in the Municipal hospitals, while in the interior villages, where facilities of the modern medicine are not available, they use the indigenous medicine and worship and propitiate the god Madaikho. The proporation is done by Hojai and the family has simply to bring the materials for the desired propitiation.

### **Recreation**

The Dimas Kacharies who are staying in the villages and are agriculturists, work in their fields from morning until evening and relax themselves only after coming from the fields. The men and women sit around the hearth snapping stories and gossiping about the fields and crops and the prospects of the coming harvest, thus removing the fatigue due to the days work. When they meet with friends and relatives the inevitable subject of crops always comes up for discussion amongst them apart from some family matters or other matters. Some time they sing in chorus while working in the fields or sing simple melodies while thrashing the crops, which seems to dispel the fatigue due to the hard labour and weariness from the body and mind. Though they have to undergo through the rigours of nature which makes their life hard, yet their hearts are full with hope and joy and they are satisfied with what they have. They are the children of the nature and find music in the winds, streams and woods which fill their mind with much delight.

### **Games**

The little boys and girls in the Village do not play any specific game, to them, games are like climbing trees, or throwing stones, or other similar activities with which they remain



engaged and thus spend the day until feel tired and go to their homes. The grown up boys and girls play some of the modern games borrowed from outside, generally learned through the school mates or from the plains people. Hide and seek is played generally by girls. Football is a favourite game among the boys especially those who are staying in the urban areas. Sometimes teams are formed among themselves for friendly matches for a tournament in a competition. Indoor games like carrom, ludo, and cards etc. are also played by both young and old. Those who have received some education read newspapers, story books etc. or sometime listen to the radio or transistor if available, in a neighbour's home or if possessed by them.

The housewives and elderly women are hard pressed with their household chores such as fetching water, cooking, cleaning and washing etc. and whatever little time they get to spare as leisure time they spend in gossiping or visiting friends and relatives. The young men frequently go during their leisure time for shooting some wild game or fishing in the nearby ponds. The village young men particularly those who are staying in the interior villages generally spend their leisure time in dancing or singing or playing on the drums or discuss problems which they come across in their day-to-day life and exchange their experiences.

## *Language and Literature*

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The Dimasa Kacharis speak the Kachari language, which is followed by the other sections of the Kacharis like Barman Kachari, Mech Kachari, Sanwal Kachari etc. Sir George Grierson (Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. III, Part II) classed the Kachari language in the Naga-Bodo group. In 1921 Census there were 259,587 Bodo, Mech and Plains Kachari speakers, (p. 58) while Dimas speakers (p. 59) were 11,040 persons of which 5519 were males and 5,521 were females. In 1931 Census (p. 228-229) Bara, Bodo or Plains Kacharies were 282, 582 of which 143,544 were males and 139,038 were females. While the Dimasa of Hill Kacharis numbered 14680 of which 7439 persons were males and 7241 were females.

The total number of Dimasa Kacharis who have stated their mother-tongue as Dimasa Kachari is given below:

(Census of India: Assam: Vol. III, Part V.A., pp. 370-381).

Total Speakers

<i>Tribe</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Mother Tongue</i>
Dimasa	2,323	1,920	Assamese
Kachari	6,641	5,460	Bangali
	31	61	Bodo/Boro
	10,874	9,490	Dimasa
	—	45	Garó
	6	—	Haijong/Haijong
	8,604	7,482	Kachari
	8,087	7,683	Mikir
	1	1	Naga-Unspecified
	8	—	Rabha

The table above shows that the Dimasa Kacharis who had reported Dimasa to be their mother-tongue are maximum in number, the next in descending order comes Kachari and Mikirs respectively. Thus it is evident that the Dimasa Kachari have reported different languages as their mother-tongues. Majority of the Dimasa Kacharies belong to the Dimasa, Kachari, Mikir Bengale and Assamese language group.

There are a few publications like magazines and books in the Dimasa language with the Bengali script. Some of them are translations of famous Bengali books like Naukabilas.

A list of the few books are given as follows :

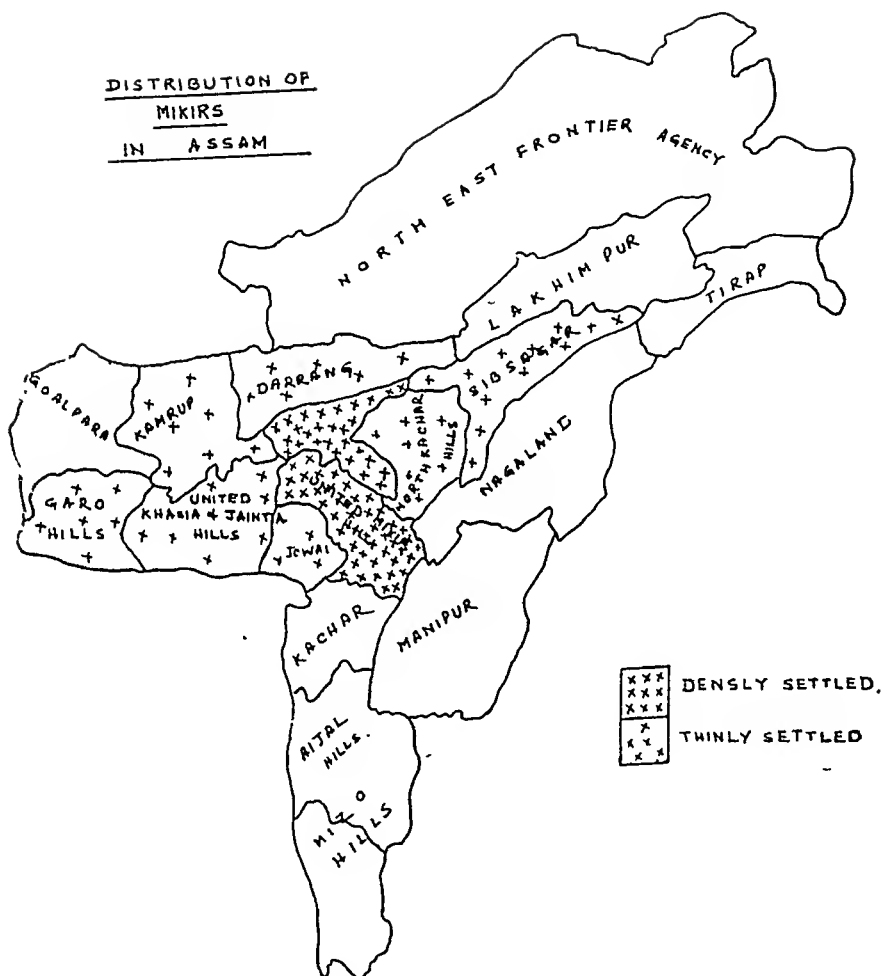
1. Jamiyani Rajthai
2. Malsokhruni Malsothsothai Ranghha Dihahaihe
3. Dimasa

The literacy percentage of Dimasa Kachari is 8.89% while the literacy percentage of Dimasa Kachari is 29.57% percent among the Scheduled Tribes of Assam and 0.66% when the total population of the state is taken.

# MIKIRS

## PART II

DISTRIBUTION OF  
MIKIRS  
IN ASSAM



xxx	DENSELY SETTLED.
xxx	
xxx	
x	THINLY SETTLED
x	
x	

BIROI

A MIKIR VILLAGE HOUSE PLAN.

Damthak

Dambuk

T I B U N G

GRANARY

Fireplace

Mud & Cowdung mixtures

Kut

Centre bamboo pillars

HONGKUP

Door

GUEST

Bamboo supports  
(KAM)

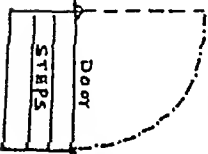
ROOM



Corner Bamboo Pillars

Door

STEPS





*Mikir Villager*



*Mikir Peasant Woman*

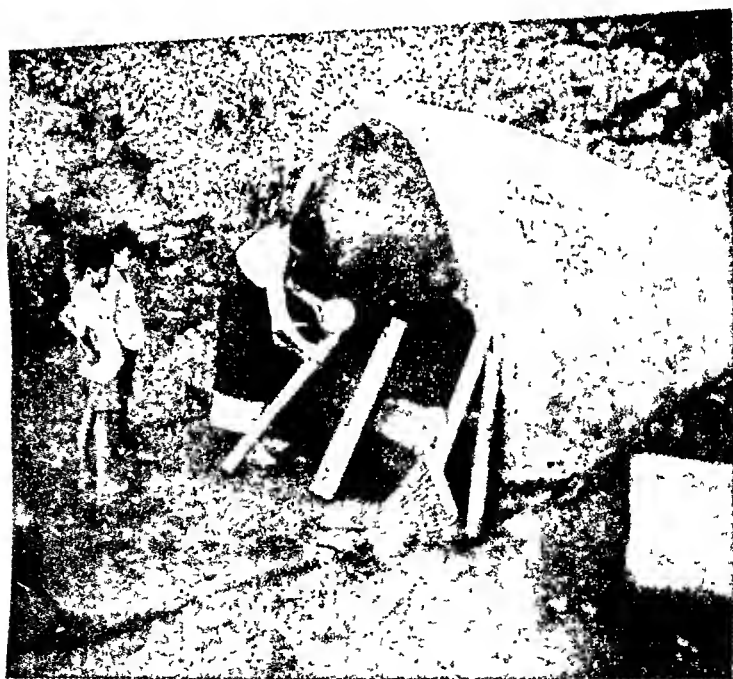


*Mikir Girls*





*Group of Lushai Girls*

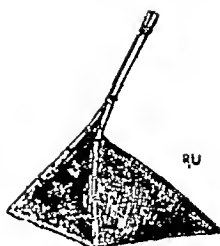


*Woman Fetching water from a well*

HAK

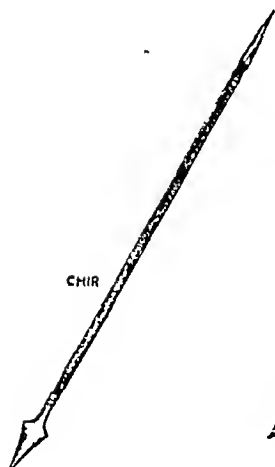


RU

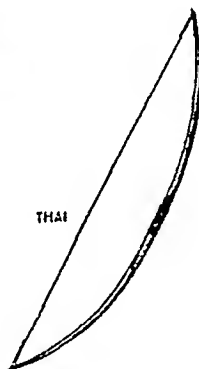


FISHING IMPLEMENTS

CHIR



THAI



ASO

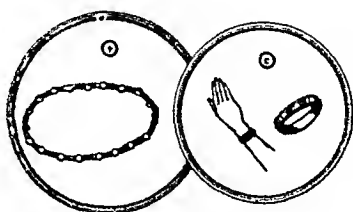


*Mikir Fishing Implements*



A TYPICAL MIKIR HOUSE

*A Typical Mikir House*



*Ornaments*

## *Introduction*

### **The Mikir**

The origin of the word 'Mikir' is not known. Some eminent writers<sup>1</sup> wrote that the name 'Mikir' is given to the race by the Assamese. The Mikirs call themselves 'Arleng' meaning 'man' in general. Not warlike and rather peaceful in Character, they are also extremely homogeneous. Whether in the North Cachar Hills, the Mikir Hills, the Jaintia Hills or Nowgong, their tribal institutions, their language and their national character are all identical. The practise jhuming in the same manner as their fore-fathers who raised in ordinary years hardly sufficient food even for their bare subsistence.

Dr. Grierson in his 'Linguistic Survey of India Vol. III, Part II, classed them as intermediate between the Boros and the Western Nagas, but Dr. S.K. Chatterjee in his Indo-Mongoloids, 1951, classed them with those tribes which form the connecting link between the Nagas and the Kuki clans. The preponderance of their affinities lies with the latter.

1. L.A. Waddell—Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley 1900 P. 29.  
Edward Stack—The Mikirs 1908—P. 4.

<sup>2</sup>The Mikirs had once settled in strength in North Cachar to the immediate north of Borail range. The oppression of the Kachari kings compelled them to migrate westward to the territory of the Jaintia Raja for protection. <sup>3</sup>Although in this region, north of the Borail, no more Mikir villages are now found, local names belonging to their language indicate their former existence. But while living there they must have been in contact with tribes belonging to the Kuki-Chin stock who have for centuries occupied the the hill ranges to the south of the valley of Cachar and the mountains between that valley and Manipar. <sup>4</sup>Colonel Dalton also supported this view and said that the original home of the Mikirs was in North Cachar but they were afterwards driven into the Jaintia territory by the Kacharis. But there they were dissatisfied with the treatment accorded to them by the Jaintias also, and so they sent an embassy to the Ahom governor at Baha offering to place themselves under his protection. As their envoys could not make themselves understood, they were buried alive in a tank. Hostilities ensued and the Mikirs were soon suppressed. Henceforth they settled in the hills that now bear their name although a good number of them are still found in Nowgong and the Jaintia Hills.

### **Divided into sub Tribes**

The Mikirs are divided into four sub-tribes, namely, Chintong, Ronghang, Amri and Dumrali and these sub-tribes are again subdivided into various exogamous groups. Chintong and Ronghang rank higher than Amri simply for the fact that the Amris excused themselves from sending a representative on the fatal mission to the Ahom Raja in Sibsagar (Raha) when a representative was required from each tribe. The Amri sub-tribe is therefore excluded from sharing the liquor drunk at sacrifices and they were looked down upon especially by the

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2. Edward Stack—*The Mikirs* 1908—P. 151-153.

3. C.J. Lyall—*Report on the Census of Assam*, 1881 Ch. VI, P. 78.

4. Colonel Dalton—*Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, V. 14, Part I, 1845.

Western Mikirs. Dumralis acted as inter-preters to the embassy and were therefore allowed to have a share of the liquor. Hence it may be presumed that they had lived in the Assam Valley for a pretty long time until they were driven to the hills they inhabit at present.

### **Ethnic Composition**

Different authorities like C.J. Lyall in his "The Report on the Census of Assam, 1881 ; Dalton in the Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1845, and L.A. Waddell in the Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley, 1900" have given different opinions regarding the classification of the Mikir Tribe into Kurs or exogamous groups. These 'Kurs' are further classified into sub-kurs or sub-groups. The following table shows the names of such groups and their sub-groups as well as the number of persons belonging to the group or sub-group.

From the table it is seen that the people are divided into five exogamous groups or kurs, viz., Terang, Ingti, Rang-hang, Teron and Timung and these are sub-divided into sub-groups or sub-kurs. There is no class system among the Miris and there is no such distinction as high and low classes.

### **Settlement**

The settlement is not a compact one and houses appear on top of six low hills and they are all connected by footpaths. The nature of the family looks like the joint type, that is, all members of a family occupy a single house. The house is, as a rule, divided lengthwise by a partition into two or three rooms with one portico on one side. Generally the house is divided into a 'kam' or a room for outsiders or guests which is always on the right side where the only door into the house leads to, and another which is known as a 'kut' is meant only for the family. In the 'kut' a platform or chang about 2 ft high called 'tibung' and raised above the floor runs along the wall and is used as sleeping apartments for the members of the family, that is, for the young, and unmarried sons, or in some cases, for the married couple and in that case the unmarried

TABLE

Name of group	TERANG						INGTI						RONGHANG				TERON			TIMUNG																				
Name of Sub-group	Beh			Kro			Returns as Terang			Hanse			Ing'eng			Returns as Ingti			Tiso		Returns As Rongbang		Not Classified			Tokbi			Rongpher			Phongcho			Dero			Returns As Timung		
	M	F	M	M	F	M	F	M	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F								
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29												
277	19	15	4	3	5	9	1	1	12	7	23	19	6	4	15	20	14	21	2	1	7	7	10	6	1	3	19	23												

sons have to sleep along with their parents in the Damthak. Outside the wall of the 'kut' but attached to the house is a place called 'biroi' in which fowl and goats are kept. There is a fire place called 'mehip' lying at the back of the 'kut' and by the side of the fireplace is the 'damthak' where the heads of the family, *i.e.*, the father and the mother, sleep. Here also stands a paddy receptacle (ingkro) made of bamboo. Behind the fireplace there is a place called 'dambuk' which is attached to the 'damthak', where the young and unmarried girls sleep. The front verandah is known as 'hong-kup' in which are kept the loin loom, baskets, firewood, mortar and pestle, vegetables, etc.

The floor of the house is usually raised about four feet or more above the ground and is supported by strong posts on all sides. The whole structure of the house including the side walls is made of split bamboo finely woven and knitted together so firmly that no mud plastering or anything of the sort is necessary. The roof of the house which always consists of two sloping parts is thatched with sun grass which is generally replaced after a lapse of four or five years. The floor of the house is covered with knitted bamboos arranged as above and fastened at each end to the posts which support the roof of the house. The inside of the house is rather dark except for the scanty light that filtrates through the openings in the split bamboo walls. There is no window or chimney—the main door and the tiny slits in the bamboo walls act as sources of ventilation.

### Staple Food

So far food is concerned Rice is the staple food of the Mikirs, but they also eat all kinds of flesh including beef. But there is not a single household in the village which keeps a cow or any draught cattle. This is due to the fact that cattle cannot be kept in confinement and when they are allowed to roam they may be killed by wild animals especially tigers. Fowl, goats and pigs are kept for their meat and are used specially at sacrifices. Eggs are eaten and the flesh of various wild animals and birds is also taken. Meat is eaten either roasted or cooked or after it

is thoroughly dried over the fire in the 'chang'. Sometimes meat is also dried in the sun. The villagers prefer dried fish which they store in small baskets which are placed by the fireside. Vegetables (han) of all kinds including wild vegetables and also roots of trees and plants are taken by them.

## **Drinks**

The Mikirs are all addicted to strong drink which is known to them as 'hor'. This is a rice beer prepared by each household for its own needs. Women and children do not indulge in this drink. There are different kinds of rice beer prepared by them, viz, 'arak' which is the strongest variety, 'thap' a medium-strength liquor and 'hor' which is mild and ideal for a common family drink. Gourds are used for keeping rice beer as well as for carrying it about for outside use. 'Hor' figures prominently in the observance of their ceremonies and festivals. Tobacco is also widely in use by the grown-up males and small tobacco pipe (thenghong) is used for smoking. Opium and tobacco are grown by them though in small quantities. Betelnut (kove) together with pan leaf (bikon) and lime purchased from the market is heavily consumed by both sexes- an indulgence which is common among all people of Assam. Reckoning of time and measuring of distances during journeys are made on the basis of the number of betel pieces chewed at intervals.

## **Mikirs (Males) Dress**

The Mikirs commonly put on a piece of cloth known as 'rikong' which is wrapped round the loin and on their heads they wear tubans called 'poho' which is similar to that used by the male khasis. Males also use a waistcoat called 'choi' with a long fringe which covers the buttocks and comes around in front. An endi cloth called 'peinki' is used by them during the cold season. Women put on a petticoat known as 'peni' which is fastened round the waist with an ornamental girdle of old silver coins called 'vankok'. Another cloth known as 'pekok' is used to cover the upper part of the body. This cloth is tied under the arms and drawn tight over the breasts. The hair is combed straight and tied in a knot (chubi) the head. No foot-



wear is used by them. The Mikirs are fond of ornaments too.

A characteristic ornament is a large silver tube which is inserted into a hole pierced in the lobe of the ear known as 'nothangpi'. Males wear 'norik' or earring of gold suspended from the lobe of the ear. Necklaces called 'lek' of coral beads are worn by women. Rings or 'urnam' and bracelets or 'roi' of gold and silver respectively are worn by women while the former are worn by men also.

### Monogamy

Monogamy is the rule in the Mikir and polygamy, though permissible, is rare. The Mikirs are also divided into a number of clans and therefore marriage within one's own clan is not permissible. One of the important sequences of this tribe into a number of clans is to avoid taboo (lainsnem) such as is laid down by their traditional customs. Cross-cousin marriage is generally preferred by the villagers. But while one can marry his father's sister's daughter or his mother's brother's daughter, it is taboo to marry his father's or mother's sister or father's daughter or mother's sister's daughter belonging to a different clan.

### Child Marriage

Child marriage is not the practice. If a young man fancies a girl, he informs his parents who go to her parent's house and make their offer of marriage of their son with the girl. If the girl's parents agree to the proposal, the boy's parents give a betrothal ring or bracelet to the girl. This is known as 'sim keba' or formal engagement.

### Seduction

Seduction is rare, and when it occurs, the girl's parents have to give their girl away in marriage to the boy. Illegitimate birth in the village is nil. Adultery, even if it exists, is as general rule very rare and such a case is tried by the village

Council. The guilty pair are tried publicly thus subjecting them to the jeers and scorn of their neighbours. They are released only after the fine imposed by the Council is paid. Capital punishment in such cases is never inflicted. The husband of the erring wife may take her back ; he may also refuse to do so except when the wife has borne him children. Remarriage of widows is allowed. Divorce (Kachati) is rare though it is allowed provided there has been no off spring. Divorce can also be granted when the girl runs to her home after marriage and refuses to go back to her husband.

### **Funeral Rites**

The Mikirs do not normally bury their dead. Cremation is the usual method of disposing the dead and is done after the performance of some ceremonies. The body of a still-born child, a child who dies soon after birth, or of a mother who dies during child birth, is buried without any ceremony. Victims of smallpox or cholera are buried shortly after death, but the funeral rites for the deceased are performed later, the dead body or bones being dug up and cremated according to custom. In the case of a person killed by a tiger, the body or his clothes, if found, are buried at some distance from the village because the tiger is supposed to visit the burial place.

### **Economic Life**

The economic life of the Mikirs is simple and the whole lot of them depend for their livelihood mainly on cultivation. Paddy is the most important crop and the villagers attach more importance to the growth of paddy than to that of any other crop. Next to paddy, maize, gourds, sesame, cotton, etc., are grown as side-lines in the jhum fields along with paddy. Livestock occupies the next important place in respect of the sources of wealth of the village. The rearing of livestock such as pigs, goats and fowl is also important for both ceremonial and religious reasons apart from their economic value. Though weaving, bamboo and cane works which require much skill and labour are followed by them, the people do not depend for

their subsistence either mainly or partially on any of them with the result that these minor but important industries receive no particular attention. This apathy is mainly due to the availability of factory product in the markets at a reasonable rate. These industries are considered only as part-time jobs and that also not for marketing purposes, but only for their personal use. The village is rich in forest resources ; hence firewood and building materials are easily and abundantly available. The forests are owned by the community and any person can use the timber free of cost, but clearing the forest for jhumming without the permission of the village Council (mei) is prohibited.

### Occupations

Weaving occupies the position of a very important household industry among the Mikirs. A crude wooden loom called 'petherang' or loin-loom is employed in weaving. The spinning wheel by which cotton raised in their fields is spun into thread is known as 'mithongrang'. Weaving is done mainly by women which art has been their skill and pride from time immemorial.

### Hunting

The Mikirs are very fond of hunting and fishing, especially the latter, in which both men and women generally take part. There is no recognized functionary who takes the initiative, or who plays some special role in either hunting or fishing. The hunting season is usually during the winter months when all are not occupied with cultivation although only male folks take part in hunting. The chief implements used in hunting are the spear (chir), bow (thai) and arrow (thai aso), while dogs are used to track down animals. No gun is used by the villagers because none can afford to buy one or none gets a licence for possessing one.

### Fishing

Fishing is also practised with as much interest as hunting and both men and women take part. A fishing party is also

sometimes organized and every member carrying fishing baskets (hak) and traps set out for the nearby stream. A Trap (ru) is placed at one end of the flowing water and both men and women wade into the stream and beat the water with sticks which they carry in their hands thus frightening away the fishes and driving them straight into the 'ru'. Another method of catching fish is by placing a basket under the water for some time until the fishes have gathered there when it is lifted up. But this method needs energy, time and patience and is generally practised by women. Rods, lines and hooks are also used and are common with the young boys. Another common method is by poisoning the river or stream with a certain kind of wild plant. The plant is boiled first and the juice thus obtained from it is used to poison the fish.

### **Progress and Welfare**

While development measures relating to communication, improvement in agriculture, poultry and livestock, water supply etc. have been spread over and proved beneficial to most of the villagers within the jurisdiction of the Block, but it is still backward. Agriculture is still practised according to age-old methods with primitive daos and kodalis and the villagers have to toil hard to earn their living. Though wet cultivation has been taken up by the villagers, there is not much scope for development as most of the tract is hilly. Only in small valleys intercepted by hills could the land be put to wet cultivation, but the extent of such lands is insignificant. There is no dispensary either for persons or for animals in or around the village except the one which is faraway hence villagers take recourse to self-trained medicinemen who provide sacrifice and herbal medicines to every person in the village. They have witch doctors to perform sacrifices for the cure of ailments. But as man is what he believes, they are not worse off despite all their drawbacks.

## *History of Mikirs*

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### **The Word Mikir**

The Mikir is one of the Scheduled tribes of Assam as given in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes lists Modification Order, 1956.

The non-Mikirs in general call this tribe as Mikirs, while they call themselves as *Kurbi* or *Arleng* of which the former that is Karbi is more common in use. The Mikirs call non-Mikirs particularly the Dimasa Kachari, Bodo Kachari and Assamese as *Parok*. This has been derived from the Mikir word 'Parok-jangphong (Parok of the non-Mikirs) ; jangphong-fruit ; that is fruit of the non-Mikirs, implying jackfruit). The etymological significance of the name 'Karbi' as the legend tells that the name 'Karbi' comes from the latter half of the word 'Thakarkabi', meaning offering of sacrifices at the beginning of worship of god, marriage ceremony, harvesting of crops and birth of a child, which is called 'Thakar kibi'. The word ultimately got transformed into 'karbi', thus omitting 'tha' and 'ki' of the word.

There is another legend which tells us that once upon a time a 'Mikir' man left a flaming fire at his own home while his wife asked him "Me askar chenghoi bi kangkok" meaning why he left the flaming fire, these somehow got transformed into 'karbi' and so the later generations were known as 'karbi'.

According to Lyall (1908, p. 4-5), Arleng properly means a Mikir man and not a man in general who would, according to him be called 'monit' - 'munit'. Further, according to him the etymological significance of the name Arleng came from the fact that their forefathers generally used to dwell on the hill slopes and so they were known as *Arleng* or hill dwellers or hillman.

According to Gemini Paul (1956, p. 152) the word 'Mikir' is a combination of 'Mikiri', meaning 'hill people'. But according to the Mikir this has been wrongly expressed by the other. Instead of *Mi-Kiri* it should be Mengkiri (Meng-cat; kiri-to search) and according to the Mikirs there is a legend behind this which is as follows :

## History

Once long, long back a few Mikirs were in search of the pet cat which they lost sight of in the jungle while they are hunting. Then those Mikirs roamed through the jungle in the search of the cat. During the search for the cat they met a non-Mikir person (could not say the community with certainty Dimasa Kachari or Assamese) in the jungle. The non-Mikir asked the Mikirs what they were searching for but the Mikirs could not follow his language but only answered Meng-kiri, that is, searching for a cat, searching for a cat. Since then the Mikirs are known as Meng-kiri which later got transformed into Mikir by the non-Mikirs.

The Mikirs do not claim any relationship with any other or community. According to Edward Stack (1908, p. 4-5) the Mikirs belong undoubtedly to the great Tribe to-Burmese stock while Gemini Paul (1956) stated "though originally of Austric origin, probably the latest migration, they are now overwhelm-

ingly a mixture of the 'Austrie' and 'Bodo' with the latter as the predominant strain". Sir George Grierson (1904-1928) classed them as intermediate between the Bodo and Western Nagas on linguistic grounds.

According to Dalton (1872 : p. 54), "they were driven by Kacharies from what is called Tolaram's country between Nowgong and Kachar, and sought refuge in Jyntia, but not being satisfied with their reception, they placed themselves under the Rajas of Assam, and have ever since peaceably occupied the hill country in which they are now settled. It is said they were disarmed or made to forswear the use of arms by the Assam Government, and this is assigned as the cause of their unwarlike disposition, which makes them good subjects, but exposes them to the attacks of their more warlike neighbours". The Tularam's country possibly imply the area under the rule of the Dimasa Kachari King whose general or 'Senapati' was Tularam.

According to Lyall (c. f. Assam Census Report 1881 ; p. 78-81) . . . . "there are sufficient indications to warn us in declaring Mikir to be the Kinsman of Bodo rather than of Khasi . . . . . On the whole, until we know more about the Naga dialects bordering on the Mikir country. I think we may conclude that this language is an outliner of the Bodo or Kachari group, though perhaps widely separated from the general stock than other members of the family".

### **Tibeto-Burman Stock**

Edwrrd Stack (1908) claimed that the Mikirs belongs to the great Tibeto-Burman stock, while Gemini Paul (1956) stated that of Austrie origin, probably of the latest migration, they are now overwhelmingly a mixture of the 'Austrie' and 'Bodo' with the latter as the predominant strain". According to Sir George Grierson (1904-28), Mikirs were classed on linguistic grounds as intermediate between Bodo and the western Nagas and Lyall (Census of Assam, 1881) Supported the fact from linguistic grounds and classed them as kinsman of Bodo.

In Robinson's Account of Assam (of Assam Census Report, 1881 : p. 77-78) it is stated, " . . . the Mikirs have tradition that their ancestors originally came from the Jaintia Hills. Colonel Dalton's version of the legend is that they only went to Jaintia on their expulsion from Tularam's country by the Kachari, and that not being satisfied with their new quarters, they eventually placed themselves under the protection of the Rajas of Assam. The story that I have been told of first appearance in Assam is that driven out of the Jaintia hills into what is now the Nowgong district, they sent emissaries to claim protection from the Ahom province of Raha. These luckless persons being unable to make themselves understood were straight away buried alive in a tank which that officer was then engaged in excavating. The hostilities which ensued were concluded by an embassy to the king himself in Sibsagar, and the Mikir have been living peacefully ever since in the territory assigned them".

### **Progeny of Valmiki**

According to Pakrashi (1954), Arlengs or Mikirs have a vague idea that they are the progeny of Valmiki of Mahabharat. Sometime in the distant past, the ancestors of the present day Arlengs had settled on the eastern slopes of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, bordering on the Kopili river (Nihang). The following account has been collected by Pakrashi (1954) about the traditional story of Arleng or Mikir migration.

When descendents of Valmiki were living peacefully in Nihang, as the legend runs they were troubled by occasional raids by Khasi invaders. Gradually they had to withdraw from their original settlements and move into the kingdom of some Kachari King of ancient Hirimbapur (present day Dimapur) and settled down as revenue payers (ryots) of the Kachari King. The common Kacharies as well as the King were naturally suspicious about these new settlers. In the pretext of 'testing' their intelligence the ministers and the King decided to give them adequate punishment. The king then proclaimed that all Arlengs of his kingdom assemble before him. When they come



to the court they were asked to straighten a buffalo horn without causing any damage to it. They were also told that if they failed, the king would seize their movable and immovable properties and that they would lose their 'status' of ryots. Apparently this task was impossible but fortunately a group of friendly cowboys come to their help, and they could straighten the horn by applying liberally wax on it. By their amicable behaviour and unfailing allegiance to the king, the Mikirs won the friendship of the Kacharis, and gradually become the most favourite subjects of the kachari king. But some of the court ministers could not tolerate the popularity and prosperity of the new settler and they tried to convince the king that the Arlengs might dethrone him. The intrigues proved successful and the loyalty and industriousness of these settlers appeared to the king to be some subtle move to overthrow the kachari rule. The arlengs now tried to test the intelligence of the Kachari and asked them to flatten a curved gourd. The king himself accepted the gourd, but in his attempt to straighten it he broke the neck of the gourd, others also tried but failed. This convinced the king and the common Kacharies that the Arlengs were really intelligent. But a section of the ministers being jealous tried to poison the ears of the king with falicious allegations. They again appealed to the king to test the intelligence of the Mikirs by asking them to make a garland of sand and paddy flowers, they also requested the king to take severe action against them, if they fail, so that they may not live in this kingdom.

The king then asked the Mikirs to get this thing done. They again sought the help of the cowboy and with amazing ingenuity the cowboys did what was impossible for the Mikirs. The king was so delighted with the garland that he at once proposed to hold a royal hunt to test the skill of the Arleng ryots. The party was not successful because no game was found. On his way back, the King however, found a tiger which he brought home.

The crafty ministers advised the king to feed the cub on cow's milk, but secret instructions were given by them to spread the

false rumour that the king wanted the Mikirs to feed his tiger cub upon human milk. Men were accordingly, sent to collect milk from the Arleng women. The spell of torture and molestation that followed compelled the Arlengs to flee from the Kachari kingdom and searched for a new homeland where they could leave in peace. When the king's men visited the Arleng settlement for a fresh supply of milk then a solitary and brave girl Rongpharpi who stayed behind in the village asked them to come inside the dark cottage one by one to collect the milk. As the king's men entered the dark cottage, one by one the axe from Rongpharpi and the man was severed in two. Thus many Kachari lost their lives in the hand of the gallant girl Rongpharpi. The rest fled in panic to the king.

On getting this information, the king with his troops followed the trail of the fleeing Arlengs in the deep jungles but the pursuit appeared to be fruitless. So the king sent spies who entered deep into the forest and came across the fugitive Arlengs, mixed and stayed with them. But one night, the Arlengs discovered that their Kachari 'friend' had disappeared. So immediately they moved forward towards remote forests and came to Barpani (near Chaparmukh railway junction) where a big river obstructed their path which they crossed and settled on a clearing reaching the bank. On getting this information the king moved to Barpani with his troops to punish the Arlengs.

### **The Kacharis**

The Kacharis tried to cross the river by a wooden bridge, but when the kingsmen reached the middle, the bridge collapsed drowning a good many of them. The Arlengs thanked God for the rout of their enemies. The king then gave up the pursuit because he came to believe that God was protecting the Arlenges.

One night Rongpharpi dreamt that God was asking her to come and visit his kingdom, next morning, Rongpharpi found a white elephant hitherto unknown to the Arlengs, and was desiged with joy, for God had sent this elephant to show the path to his kindom. Other Arlengs came and saw this miracle.

They also found a big tiger roaming about in the clearing made by the white elephant. Rongpharpi then now spoke about her dream and told the Arlengs that God had ordained that she should lead the Arlengs to his abode. So Rongpharpi trailed the foot prints of the tiger and the Arlengs followed her down the clearing in the jungle. During their trailing Rongpharpi chanced upon a full granary with a few beautiful nuts nestling nearby, this she considered to be the kingdom of God, and the Arlengs settled down on the site. Years passed by and the Arlengs lived in peace and prosperity.

Meanwhile, Chintong, who lived in God's company fell in love with Rongpharpi and she too could not resist him. This made Arnamkethe angry with Chintong, and Rongpharpi. She dreamt that God was very much displeased with her conduct and ordered her folk to leave his kingdom. The Arlengs had then to leave the kingdom of God. Chintong proposed marriage to her, Rongpharpi accepted him, and they lived as man and wife. The Arlengs too accepted this union in their society.

In time a boy was born to Chintong and was named Thong, who gradually grew up to a handsome youngman. But Arlengs could not enjoy their prosperity for long, because the Khasi and Jaintia people destroyed their houses and friends. When the Arlengs began to resist the invaders, the Khasi king proposed that the Arlengs should co-operate with the Khasi in clearing jungles and making roads. One evening the Khasi and the Arleng working parties assembled in a rest house, there the Khasi gang leader wished to count the Arlengs who were working. The counting was done by marking every tenth man on the forehead with a dao-blade. Thong came to learn about the incident and after taking blessings of his mother he appealed to the Arlengs to muster courage and fight back.

The next time when the Khasis and the Arlengs again assembled in the rest house, the Khasis proposed that heads should be counted as before. Thong this time took the opportunity and suggested that the Arlengs should now take their

turn in counting the Khasis. The Khasis agreed, and Thong now took the revenge, he began to chop off the head of every tenth man, and in a short time many Khasi heads were severed. Then the Khasis tried to run away, but the Arlengs pounced upon them and killed many of them.

When the king learned of this he became enraged and sent of his best warriors to teach a lesson to Thong and the Arlengs. Thong fought gallantly and killed one, and gouged the eyes of the other and then sent the heads of the warriors back to the Khasi kings.

To make peace the Khasi king welcomed Thong to his court, where he felt proud and boasted that even wild elephants would be less than his match, what to speak of man. The Khasi king now proposed that Thong should demonstrate his might in a tug-of-war with thousand elephant. Thong accepted and when the elephants were brought, they raised their trunks and saluted the hero in respect and thus he won the challenge. The Khasis were amazed and they all immediately acclaimed him a superhuman hero and warrior.

The Khasi king next time ordered his men to let loose venomous cobras upon him by surprise. When Thong found that he was about to be encircled by the snakes, he clamped battle shields tight over the mouth of the pits and dropped off their fangs. So the Khasi king was finally convinced that, Thong was no ordinary mortal. So he declared before his people that he would adopt Thong as his eldest son in order to succeed him and ordered his subjects to pay respect to Thong as the eldest son of their king. Thong was greeted with cheers by the Khasis, except few who could not feel happy over it.

When the Khasi king learned that the Arlengs suffered at the hands of the Kacharies, then he asked Thong to take out an expedition against the Kacharies.

Thong and his soldiers successfully subdued the Kacharies in due course. On their way back the Khasi soldiers encamped

in a banana grove where some of the Khasi soldiers made a plot to kill Thong. They requested Thong to pluck a few mangoes, since they could not climb the tall trees. When Thong was innocently plucking mangoes unaware of such a plot, the plotters sent swarms of arrows and Thong who was unarmed now met his tragic end. His head was chopped off. The rebels told the king a fabricated story of a bandit falling upon them on their way home. The king immediately ordered them to fetch the severed head, which proved to be that of Thong, for Thong had a tooth set with gold.

This was a shock to the king, the common Khasis and the Arlengs. Thong's mother Rongpharpi was driven mad with grief. In revenge, the king ordered live crucifications for those who murdered Thong. Thus Khasis and Arlengs lost their great friend and warrior whose memory lives forever in their hearts. From that day the Arlengs and Khasis lived together in peace until the Arlengs migrated, many years later to their present home.

### **Descendants of Thong Nokbe**

The belief still exists among the Mikirs of today that they are the descendants of a great Raja called Thong Nokbe (not Phongnogbi as reported in the Census of Assam, 1891, p. 255). Nobody knows this Raja came from but he was known to have married many women of the country where he finally settled in the far west and that his descendants worked their way eastward towards the present districts of Cachar in Assam. This claim is perhaps true to the extent that some of the villages in the North Cachar Hills bears the names belonging to their language, indicating their former presence. They had once been settled in strength in North Cachar to the immediate north of the Barail range and had been in contact with the Angami, the Kaccha and the Kabui Nagas. Due to the oppression of the Kachari kings, they migrated westwards to Jaintia Hills in search for protection from the Jaintia Raja, but while migrating to the Jaintia territory they were dissatisfied with the treatment given out to them by the Jaintia chiefs. They, therefore resolved

to move into Ahom territory and sent an embassy to the Ahom Governor at Raha (Nowgong) offering to place themselves under his protection. As their envoys could not make themselves understood, they were buried alive in a tank. The hostilities which thus ensued were concluded by an embassy to the king himself in Sibsagar. Since then the Mikirs have been living peacefully in the territory assigned to them (Census of Assam, 1891).

## *Distribution and Physical Appearance*

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### **Distribution of Population**

Regarding the geographical distribution of the Mikirs, Lyall (of. Assam Census Report 1881, p. 78) stated that, in the isolated mountainous block which fills the triangle between the Bramaputra on the north, the Dhansiri valley on the east, and *Kapil and Kalang Valleys on the West, the characteristic elements of Mikir topographical nomenclature as Lang, river, water ; Langso, small stream ; Inglong, mountains ; Long, stone; Rong, village, Sar, chiefs are found everywhere, as well as in the southern part, now inhabited by the Rengma Nagas, from the Hills across the Dhansiri as in the northern portion included in the Nowgong district and more particularly as the Mikir Hills. They are also found in considerable numbers to the south of the Langkher valley, in the mountains now inhabited by Kukis, Kutcha Nagas (Kaccha Nagas) and Kacharis, as far south as the courses of the Jhiri and Jhinam. In the centre of North Kachar they are rare ; but there is a considerable group of Mikir names again to the west of this tract about the head waters of Kopili and on the southern face of the hills north of Badarpur. Mikir*

terms also abound, mixed with Lalungs, on the the northern face of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills; and along the courses of the Kopili and Umkher rivers. Across the Brahmaputra the topographical nomenclature shows no trace of them, though there are a few colonies of them in Darrange.

### **People of the Lower Hills**

"They are thus essentially a people of the lower hills and adjoining lowlands of the central portion of the range stretching from the Garo Hills to the Patkoi. Their neighbours are (1) the Santengs of Jaintia on the west ; (2) Bodes or Kaeharis on the south ; and (3) Assamese on the north and east where the country is inhabited at all; and intermixed with them, are recent colonises of Kukis and Rengma Nagas and older ones of Lalungs and Rengma Nagas and older ones of Lalungs and Hill-kaeharis". (cf. Assam Census Report 1881, p. 78).

### **Robinson Distribution**

The distribution of Mikir as given by Robinson (cf. Assam Assam Census Report, 1881, p. 78 is as follows, "...their present seat is chiefly in the Mikir Hills, a low mountain tract in Nowgong, out off by the valleys of the Kopili and Dhansiri from the mountain range of the Naga Hills, but with Naga population in its southern half, while large numbers again are to be found still in their original settlements along the foot of the Jaintia Hills, both in Nowgong and Kamrup. A few communities have immigrated into Upper Assam and across the river into Darrange".

### **Population Trend**

The following table shows the population of Mikirs in the State of Assam from 1901 to 1961.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
1901	87,335	44,256	43,079
1911	106,259	54,257	52,002
1921	111,629	57,383	54,246
1931	129,797	66,045	63,752
1941	149,746	77,108	72,638
1951	152,537	80,373	72,164
1961	121,082	62,827	58,255



The above table shows a sudden fall of the Mikir population in the 1961 Census. This may be due to the fact that during 1961 Census only those Mikirs residing in the four Autonomous Hill Districts of Assam were enumerated while those in the plain districts were accounted with the general population. According to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes lists Modification Order, 1956, notified under the Government of India, Ministry of Home affairs, Notification No. SRO 2477A, dated 29th October, 1956, (Census of India 1961, Vol. I, Part V.A. (ii) (p. 11) the scheduled areas are regarded as such throughout the state of Assam, but the Scheduled Tribes are confined to certain Scheduled areas with in the state. A Scheduled Tribe of the Autonomous District can be regarded as such anywhere with in the four Autonomous Districts of Assam, but he cannot be regarded as a scheduled tribe if he goes outside the precincts of the Autonomous Districts. Thus a Mikir residing in Sibsagar District cannot be regarded as a Scheduled tribe.

### **Geographical Distribution**

The Arlengs or Mikirs are found only in the hill areas of Assam, particularly in the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills and Khasi and Jaintia Hills districts, and an insignificant number of them are found in Garo Hills and Mizo Hills as evidenced from the Table on next page.

It is evidenced from the table that the Mikir population is predominantly concentrated in the rural areas of the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District and in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District. They are also found in great numbers in their original settlement along the foot of the Jaintia Hills, as has already been stated earlier, they had once settled in great strength in the Jaintia *Hills* but were driven away from this area by the Jaintia Rajas. Possibly this may be the reason for the lesser concentration of the Mikirs in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills today.

In the state of Assam majority of the Mikir population is found in the age group of 0—14 years. This is also observed

TABLE

State/Districts	Total Popu- lation	Male	Female	Rural		Urban	
				Total Popu- lation	Male	Total Popu- lation	Male
Assam	121,082	62,827	58,255	120,953	62,730	129	97
Garó Hills	6	5	1	1	1	5	4
Khasi and Jaintia Hills	4,188	2,296	1,892	4,133	2,253	55	43
United Mikir and North Cachar Hills	116,887	60,525	56,362	116,818	60,475	69	50
Mizo Hills	1	1	—	1	1	—	—

(Source : Census of India, 1961 ; Vol. III, Assam Part V-A, p. 187-205)

in the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district, while in the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district majority population are found to be in the age group of 15—44 years. As the bulk of the population comes from the age-group of 0—14 years this may indicate that there is less infant mortality and when these children will attain the marriageable age there is every likelihood of the increase of the population in the future. The less number of Mikir population in the age group 15—44 years may reflect, the premature death or though nothing definitely can be stated, unless a detailed demographic study of the Mikir population is made.

### Physical Appearance

The interesting account of Lyall (1908, p. 4) throws some light about the physical characteristics of the Mikirs. "In features the men resemble Assamese of the lower classes more than most of the Tribe-to-Burmese races. Their colour is light yellowish brown and the girls are after fair. The men are as tall as the majority of the hill races of Assam." Colonel L.A. Waddel's eighteen specimen's averaging 1633 mm. or 5'354 feet in height, the tallest being 5.583 ft. and the shortest 5.108ft. The average is noticeably higher than that of their neighbours, the Khasis. The average head measurements in those specimens were, length 181 mm.; breadth—141 mm.; Cephalic index 77.9. The nose is broad at the base, and often flat, giving a nasal index of 85.1, and an orbitonasal of 107.7. The facial hair is scanty, and only a thin moustache is worn. The front of the head is sometimes, but not generally shown. The hair is gathered into a knot behind, which hangs over the nape of the neck. The body is muscular, and the men are capable of prolonged exertion".

### Measurements of Mikirs

According to Waddel (1900 cf. Gupta & Dutta, 1962) (p. 9) measurements on 18 Mikirs are as follows :

	mean
<i>Stature</i> (mm)	1633
<i>Cephalic Index</i>	78.17
<i>Nasal Index</i>	85.84

**Pakrashi Cephalic Index**

The stature distribution as given by Pakrashi (1953) are as follows. The number of individuals studied by Pakrashi being large (n=100). Only few are given below :

<i>Stature</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Very Short	5	5.00
Short	54	54.00
Below Medium	19	19.00
Medium	14	14.00
Above Medium	7	7.00
Tall	1	1.00

<i>Cephalic Index</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Hyperdolichcephal/		
Dolichocephal	82	82.09
Mesocephal	17	17.00
Brachycephal	1	1.00

<i>Nasal Index</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Leptorrhine	20	20.00
Mesorrhine	60	60.00
Chamaerrhine	19	19.00
Hyperchamaerrhine	1	1.00

<i>Facial Index</i>		
Hyperuryprosopic	20	20.00
Euryprosopic	32	32.00
Mesoprosopic	26	26.00
Leptoprosopic	16	16.00
Hyperuryprosopic	6	6.00

Thus from the above distributions on the different anthropometric measurements it is evident that the Mikirs are predominantly a short statured, long headed group with medium noses. The distribution of the facial index shows that the people are generally broad faced.

## *Economic Pursuits*

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### **Classification of Land**

Land is one of the most important economic resources of the people, their livelihood depends mainly on cultivation. The lands may be classified into five categories as, land put to nonagricultural uses, barren and uncultivable land, cultivable land, cultivable waste land and land under forest.

### **Agriculture**

The land put to non-agricultural uses include the area which is used for homestead purposes, play ground, foot paths etc. barren and uncultivable land signifies the land area which are unfit for cultivation ; cultivable land means the land under cultivation ; cultivable waste land signifies the land area which can be cultivated but is left fallow for the present time, and under forest indicates the area which is covered with jungle trees and which is not included in the net area cultivated. A general pattern of land utilization in a Mikir village in the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district is as follows :—

**Land Utilization**

<i>Categories or Lands</i>	<i>Areas in (Acres)</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1. Cultivable land	285	33.9
2. Land put to non-agricultural uses	100	11.8
3. Barren and uncultivable	100	11.8
4. Cultivable wasteland	100	11.8
5. Land under forest	258	30.7
Total	843	100.0

**Mikir Hill District**

The distribution of land in a village is governed by the Mikir Hills District (Jhuming) (Amendment) Regulation, 1966, passed by the Mikir Hills District Council. According to this regulation Jhum land is restricted to one particular area for a village which may be selected by the villagers in consultation with the 'sarthe' or 'gaonbura' of a village. If any disagreement arise about selection of jhuming site among the villagers, the 'sarthe' refers the case to the Executive Committee of the District council and its decision in this respect is final. Individual plots within the selected area may be selected by the people themselves in consultation with their 'Sarthe'. The District Council reserves the right of disposing of the felled stuff in jhum area in any manner it considers suitable without interfering jhuming. The villagers shall be jointly or individually responsible for any damage to areas not from the Jhumed areas. Jhum lands are generally marked by the owners with a boundary in the nature of a fence or drain or line and the 'Sarthe' of a village will see that such marking does not encroach on other's land. There is no restriction as to the size of the land allotted to different individuals, it depends upon

the ability or capacity of a family to cultivate. It may be noted that a person or the family lose their right of occupation and cultivation if they leave the village or shift to other village (or another 'hawar' or jurisdiction of another 'Sarthe') for the purpose of setting there permanently. In this case they have to consult with the 'Sarthe' of that 'hawar' or village where they reside to allot them land.

### Forest Land

Forest lands are of two types (1) unclassed State forest, from where the people have the right to cut trees either for construction purposes or for fuel and (2) Reserved Forest, where the people have no right to utilize the forest material. The ever-green forests are the home of various wild animals such as elephants, buffaloes, tigers, bears, deer etc. In Mikir Hills the wild elephants are not uncommon and the wild elephants often attack villages and sometimes damage the jhum fields. Snakes of various kinds poisonous as well as non-poisonous also abound in the jungle. Rabbits are a great pests in the jhum fields and the villagers are always for the look out of the rabbit holes and always try to scare the rabbits. Monkeys often attack the jhum fields in company. Varieties of birds break the silence of the forests with their sweet melodies.

### Varieties of Trees

The forests are chiefly infested with different species of bamboo-*chek* ; cinnamon-*Thekiching Sonaru* tree *Sonaru* ; Sal tree—*Hai* ; Plantain tree—*Phinu*/Lothe ; Mangoo-*Tharve* jack-fruit—*Jangphong* and many other trees valuable for timber. The wild plantain trees abound in the forest and form a ready source of food for elephants monkeys and the like.

Demand in firewood have resulted in wanton destruction of valuable forest growth. The United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District where the tribe under study is mostly found, contains within its fold the reserve forests covering approximately an area of 641, 353 acres (District Census Handbook, United Mikir and North Cachar Hills, 1961 Census, Assam,

p. 20). With the exception of the area under Reserved Forest, the tract bears an extensive area of unclassified State Forests. This area is forest in name only, since unrestricted jhuming has virtually eaten up all most all the forest trees rendering the whole area covered with only bamboos and grasses with a few scattered trees here and there. The forest reserves of the district, particularly for the bamboo trees. Hence with a view to improving the indigenous species, a scheme for planting the bamboo trees has been undertaken in Bokajan area under the State development Scheme in the year 1955. The species planted under such schemes are 'Wahing' (*Calamus viminalis*) and 'tita' (*Calamus rotang*).

### Rearing of Livestock

The secondary occupation of the Mikirs is the rearing of livestock. Poultry, goats and pigs are commonly reared either for their food and commercial purposes or for ceremonial and sacrificial importance. Milch and draught cattle are kept for milk and for ploughing the fields respectively. Fishery is not as common as the rearing of livestock because the climatic condition as well as the terrain does not suit the rearing of fishes.

### Cultivators

The cultivators are the predominant group in the rural area, who constitute 54.2% of the total population and 91.1% of the total workers. The change in their traditional occupation, that is cultivation, is evidenced from the table, where it observed that 6,153 persons (both sexes) or 8.54% of the total workers, 72,090 who are engaged in works other than cultivator and agricultural labourer. When the males and females are separately taken it was observed, that 386 or 2.37% males and 5267 or 15.13% females, constitute the number of workers apart from cultivator and agricultural labourer out of total of 37,289 male and 34,801 female workers respectively. Thus it is evident from the above figures that the percentages of the female workers are fairly high as compared to the males workers apart from cultivator and agriculturer labourer are



considered. The number of non-workers in the rural areas are 48,903 persons of 40.38% of the total population or 67.8% of the total workers. Most of them are children of school workers, other than cultivator and agricultural labourer another non-workers.

### The Jhuming Cultivation

The Mikirs practise both wet cultivation and jhuming. Those who reside in the hills generally take to jhuming and those in the plains follow wet cultivation. Selection of the jhuming site is done by the people themselves. The village headman has generally the sole authority over the village jurisdiction called 'hawar' and who convenes a meeting for discussion regarding selection of a jhuming site. After the decision taken regarding the jhuming site, the people cut the jungle and burn the trees for jhuming. It may be noted that one person loses his right of occupation or cultivation along with his shifting to another village or another 'hawar' of a village headman. In this case the village headman can allot the land to another person who comes under his jurisdiction or to his village. Generally the people living in the hills set mark to their own plot by fencing the plot by bamboo strips. It is also observed that sometime the plots for cultivation of *individual households are scattered and there is no need of* fencing the plots and the clearing areas in the hills indicate the cultivable plot and the owner of the plot is also known, since in average a village consist of 50 to 60 households. In selecting a particular site for jhuming the person informs the 'Sarthé' regarding the selection of his particular site. This is done only to save from any controversy which later may arise for the site. The Mikirs living in the plains have acquired the knowledge of wet cultivation from the plains people. Though it is rare it is worth mentioning that the Mikirs who have the experience of wet cultivation, do so in the hills where such cultivable land is available, particularly those who are residing in the slopes of the hills. Sometime encroachment on others land may arise, where the plot is too big for the person to cultivate though it is not very frequent then in that case, the village dorbar or 'sarthé' will interfere and will allot him only

such amounts which he can cultivate when the old plot is exhausted and the person want to shift to a new plot for cultivation, then they have to get the permission of the village durbar. The village durbar seldom prohibits people to shift their cultivation site as there is no scarcity of cultivable land in the hills. But it is not necessary to shift their habitation site along with the shifting of the jhuming site. Some temporary dwelling is reconstructed near the jhuming site only to stay during the operational season, if the jhuming Land is fairly at a distance.

Before a plot is put to cultivation, trees are felled and jungle is cleaned. This is done in December or January. The felled tree are allowed to dry till March when they are set on fire. Tillage and spreading as ash is done usually by human labour with the help of hoe. Paddy is then sown with the first rains, in April-May. The clearing, slashing, burning, tillage, sowing and harvesting is done by individual family and sometime with the help of daily wage labourers. No joint participation either on the basis of the village, clan or joint or joint family is done except in harvesting where friends and relatives extend their helping hand. Paddy as is stated earlier is sown broad-cast in April or May, and is harvested in November-December. Other varieties as maize, millet etc. are also sown along with paddy as side lines in holes so made for the purpose by hoes, in the first rains and gathered in the ensuing cold weather. The ears of paddy are out with the help of a sickle. The sheaves, on getting dry, are collected and thrashed out on the spot by beating against a stone. Agricultural equipments are invariably of simple type and most of the people especially those who reside in the hills are quite ignorant of the use of artificial manures. To them dried and decomposed leaves and burnt up ashes are the only manures providing fertility to the virgin soil. The important agricultural equipments are the following *ku* (spade—which is brought from the market). The *dao* which is used in agriculture practises is of the *Nopete* type and the sickle is known as *Nokekrangso*—the blade of which is serrated, and usually 1½' in length including the handle,

### Wet Cultivation

In plains who are practising wet cultivation they keep the cultivable lands enclosed on all sides by mud walls about 8"—10" in height. If there is any stream nearby then the canals from the stream to the river may be done otherwise the fields has to depend on the monsoon rains. In wet cultivation, the soil is made into a thick paste by means of a hoe or in some cases those who can afford bullocks for ploughing use. Weeding and transplantation are done generally by women. To protect the crops from wild animals and birds, effigies are made to stand in the middle or corner of the field. A watch house (hamtap) is also constructed in the field so that the owner or any one of his family may stay to watch the crops and to keep the animals and birds away from the field.

### Ramrongkekan

During the sowing and harvesting time some ceremonies in the form of dancing and singing are performed by boys and girls while the elderly people hoe the soil and sow the seeds. The sowing dance is known as *Ramrongkekan* and is done with the accompaniment of drums. They also sow the seeds in the rhythmic way accompanied by the beating of drums and dancing.

### Hacha

Hacha is the dancing festival during the harvesting time, where boys and girls in their traditional dress dance.

### Weaving

The most important household industry among the Mikirs is weaving. The loin loom known as 'pethrang' is a simple tension loom. The spinning wheel by which cotton is spun into thread is known as 'mithongrang'. The loom is simple consisting of the warp of manageable length and breadth, is usually fastened at one end of the wall while the other end of the warp is tied around the waist of the weaver with a cane belt (thehu). No reed is used and the shed is effected by half-yealt process which is also operated by hand. The weft yarn

is inserted in the shed through a bamboo tube (nonthari lang-pong) and a bamboo or wooden string is used for beating up the weft. Weaving is done by women, which is a pride for them. The chief products of the loom are 'rikong' (a cloth used by men to wrap the loins), Peinki (worn by women around the waist) etc. They generally dye their threads in blue, yellow and red colours. The black dyes are obtained from the juice of a certain plant called 'sibu', a yellow colour from a plant called 'Jantarlong' and that of red colour from a plant called 'Tansir'. The designs, generally preferred by them are stripes in various combinations of colour. Generally the products of the loom are for their personal use. Below is given the names of some of the parts of the loin loom in Mikir terms.

### **Part of the Loin Loom**

<i>Mikir Terms</i>	<i>Corresponding Meaning</i>
Thehu	A cane belt used on loin of weaver to fasten and tighten the loom.
Harpi	A piece of pointed and flat wooden or bamboo stick used as reed.
Thoning	A round bar of wood or bamboo on which threads of the loom are wrapped.
Honthari	A rod of bamboo on which thread is wound.
Honthai langhong	A bamboo tube in which 'Honthari' is kept.
Uwek	Small rods of bamboo.
Ule	Long rods of bamboo like Umek,
Takeri	A kind of bobbin.

<i>Mikir Terms</i>	<i>Corresponding Meaning</i>
Honlam	A bamboo or wooden stick on both sides of which small bars are fitted as 'cross' and threads are wrapped on it.
Sirki	A spool.
Thelangpong	Bamboo pipe for helping the healds.
Hi-i	Healds.
Honki Chongbong	Bamboo or wooden stick used for drying Eri cocoon.
Ingthi	A reed of loom.
Ponglang	Same as 'Tholengpong' but small in size.
Therang	Round bar of bamboo wood.
Barlim	A flat and small rod of bamboo.

### **Bamboo and Cane work**

With the exception of weaving which is practised in every Mikir village, bamboo and cane works and blacksmithy are practised only in few villages and by those who know the art. These two household industries are done by males and the industries are taken up much for their personal use than for sale. Any male knowing the art of basketry, make bamboo or cane baskets of various kinds according to the use to which they are put. For example, baskets for carrying and storing paddy, for keeping clothes and ornaments, for storing food grains etc. cane tables chairs, murrah (low stool) are also made by them, particularly those who are living in the urban areas. Blacksmithy is practised only by 'Senar' and 'Milik' the sub-clans of Timung and Teron respectively. They are the only sub-clans who are practising this industry traditionally and

formerly no other people or any other clan or in interior village can practise this trade, but presently there are no such restrictions on the clans possibly due to economic factors, it has been reported that few peoples belonging to Ingti clan have taken up blacksmithy, in the urban area. It could not be ascertained during the investigation why only the Senar and Milik clan practised this industry in the former times and why not other clans. It seems that they are the only sub-kurs who have specialized in this trade from time immemorial. But even when this is so there is no distinction among the clans either socially, economically or politically. The blacksmiths take the manufacturing knives and daos of various kinds, these are made out of discarded spades which are brought from the market at a cheaper price. They also collect old umbrella ribs which are utilized for the manufacture of needles and hooks for fishing. Ornaments which are fairly in good demand by the community such as girdles bracelets, rings and earrings of either gold, silver are made by the Khasi smiths. But the people who are living in the urban areas buy ornaments from the local markets which are brought from the plains area. Sometime even in the interior villages the ornaments of plains are found since the people coming and going to the urban centres collect ornaments for others as well.

The only source of income of the whole village is cultivation. The majority of the households are from the income group Rs. 301-630. The next higher income group is Rs. 601-900 which includes 12 households of the village while there are only 2 households which receive the maximums of Rs. 1201 and above. The minimum income of Rs. 300 and less is received by only 2 households in the village. The income from other sources such as weaving, bamboo and cane works are practically nil and even if there is any, the amount is insignificant. During the slack season weaving and basketry are taken up by women and men respectively and are generally done for domestic purposes.

## *Religion, Society and Social Structure*

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### **Religion**

The Mikirs believe in a number of gods collectively known to them as "Arnum atum" which are invoked and propitiated so that they may grant the village prosperity and happiness. These gods are worshipped in different ways at different times. Like the Khasis, the Mikirs have no idols, temples or shrines, but they believe in the form of a fetish locally known as 'bor' which are only pieces of stones by keeping which the people believe that they can become richer and lead the easier way. There are a good number of gods who receive their names from the disease caused by them. Names of some of the gods who are known for their evil doings are as follows :—

### **Names of Gods**

*Honi Arnam*—Leprosy, of if killed by tiger.

*Peng* —For general health, cause fever.

- Dor* —Eczema.  
*Hemphu* —During Child Birth.  
*Chinthong*  
*and Lamki* —Evil eyes.  
*Chomangase* —Infest hills and valleys.

Cholera or small pox are not named after any god. The people live in constant dread of these gods so they try to be in good terms with them by duly offering propitiations to them. The objects of nature such as the hills, the valleys, the trees the streams and other rocks are manifested with evil spirits which cause disease to men and as a matter of fact these gods receive their names from the diseases caused by them. The Mikirs are in constant dream and fear of these gods and hence they try to pacify them by offering due propitiations to them. Name of some of the gods who are known for their good deeds are as follows :—

*Risoarnam*—For prosperity of young boys.

*Ritarnam* —For cultivation before sowing any crop.

## Barithi

However, among the gods, the one which is known as 'Barithi', the god of heaven, is the most powerful and the dispenser of good evil. He is propitiated with a pig and the whole village takes part during the ceremony. On this occasion the priest or Kurusur as he is called, selects a wide open in the village where the animal is to be sacrificed. The blood of the animal is offered to Barithi by The Kurusar and at the same time he prays to him to free the whole village from any disease and to grant them good health for the whole year. The gods which infests the hills and the valleys—*Chomengase and Peng*—are propitiated by the sacrifice of a goat or fowl, these are propitiated by the individual family if and when they think that these gods are not pleased with them. When an epidemic disease like cholera breaks out, it is taken to be caused by 'ajoase' to whom propitiation must be made with a goat or pig. This god is also believed to infest the waters or streams.



## **Rongker**

An important ceremony known as 'rongker' is usually observed when an epidemic breaks out in the village which is believed to be caused by the god 'ajoase'. The expense of the ceremony will be borne by the families residing in the village, in cash and kind (rice) or either of it, depending upon the economic condition. In this ceremony the 'Kurusur' kills a pig, fowl or goat, at the outskirts of the village and the condition of the intestines tells the omen whether it is good or bad. While sacrificing a goat if the head is not served from the trunk by one stroke then it is considered as a bad omen.

## **Bad omen**

In the case of a fowl the head is served and it is left free and it is kept for some time in the air. While dying if its body falls on the left side then it is a bad omen while if it falls on the right side then it is considered a good omen. If the Kurusur finds a bad omen then every household in the village devotes itself to prayer to the god 'ajoase' to have mercy on them and to avert the impending calamity. If, on the other hand, the omen is good then the blood of the slaughtered animal which is shed on a plantain leaves is offered to 'ajoase' and the meat of the slaughtered animal is cooked and eaten by the village elders in the Sarthe's (Gaonbora) Courtyard.

No women can observe the sacrificial ceremony and they are forbidden to eat the meat of the sacrificial animal as it is believed that the god will not be pleased to dine together with women. But whether the omen is good or bad, the whole community is prohibited from going to work and entry into or going out from the village is strictly forbidden. This prohibition lasts for a week or to until the calamity has died down. If by chance an outsider pays a visit to the village during the calamity, he will have to put up for the night in the village and may leave it only in the morning of the following day.

**Thengthon**

Illness or trouble of any kind is ascribed to 'Thengthon', the god of jungle and trees and a goat or pig or fowl is sacrificed depending upon the economic condition, for the propitiation of the god. Barrenness in women is believed to be caused by 'so-meme' and a fowl or a goat is propitiated to ensure fertility in women. These are beside quite a number of other gods the propitiation of which forms the main object of their worship. All the gods mentioned about are placed at the family level and each household may do so according to the nature of the disease or trouble caused by the particular god.

**Arni and Chiklo**

The sun and the moon known to them as 'arni' and 'chiklo' respectively are looked upon as devines, and though no propitiation is made to them they receive due honour and respect. All the sacrifices to the gods are performed by the village priest 'Kurusur'. When the propitiation is to be done on the family level then the head of the family request the Kurusur to perform the sacrifice for the ceremony. The priest occupies a high and respectable position in the society and he is to lead a good and pious life. A person can become a Kurusur provided he is by experience, well versed in the art and technique of sacrificial ceremonies. No particular kur or sub-kur is associated with Kurusur and as ceremony is performed and no feast is given at the time of appointment of the priest. Kurusur performs duties only when need arise, and when he is requested to perform the sacrificial ceremony his services are retarded with food and drink and in some cases with cash, the amount of which never exceeding Rs. 2.00. Sometime a small village may not be having a 'Kurusur' then in that case 'Kurusur' from the near by village is summoned to serve and he is duly rewarded. It is the 'Kurusur' who decides what sort of illness the person has and what sacrifice should be performed to appease the gods responsible for the cause of this illness, he also performs all the sacrifices connected with the festivals.

### **Chomarong**

As has been stated earlier, the Mikirs believe that there is a place known as 'Chomarong' or dead man's paradise where both men and women, rich or poor will go and stay after death. A person who is justified by his good deeds in his life while on earth can only go to 'Chomarong', while a man who dies leaving behind his evil deeds on this earth is bound to be reborn. The re-birth of a man is taken by them as a punishment for his evil deeds, for a reborn person has, again to suffer the hardships and troubles of this hard-ridden world.

### **Beliefs and Practices of Non-Christian Mikirs**

The beliefs and practices of the people described in the foregoing pages belong to the non-Christian section of the Mikir population, while the Christian Mikirs who are fairly in good number (12,443 persons in 1961 Census) belong to the Baptist sect and live their life according to the tenets of Christianity.

### **Social Reform and Welfare**

During the five year plan a number of the community development blocks have been established covering almost every village in the state, there are also other organizations for social reform and welfare, working among the Mikir community.

As early as 1949, the Mikir Welfare Centre Sarihajan village (P.O. Bokaian, Sibsagar) started with some L.P. Schools, one M.V. School, one small free hotel and simple medical aid worked under the administration of the Bharatiya Adinajati Sevak Sangh. The Assam Tribal Welfare Works Organized some primary schools since 1939 in the villages of the Mikir hills area. There are also Christian Missionary activity among the Mikirs, as a result there are now a few thousand of Christian converts. The American Baptist Mission is still working among them in some parts of Nowgong District and Golaghat Sub-division. This was the condition existing before 1950. But still Christianity thought it has had far reaching efforts in the

other hill districts of Assam has not made much progress among the Mikirs and few only, of the total population are Christian converts.

### **Mikir Seva Kendra**

A few of the welfare agencies existing in the Mikir society worth mentioning are Mikir Seva Kendra, Karbi Jutang Amei, Karbi, Lammet Amei, Srimanta Sankar Mission and the Opium Prohibition organization. Among these organizations, the Srimanta Sankar Mission, the Mikir Seva Kendra and the Opium Prohibition Organization serve the people for their welfare such as modern medical treatment and abolishing the opium consuming habits which is prevalent among the community. Some trained lady workers are also engaged by these institutions to teach the village people the methods of keeping the general health in 'Modern Hygienic ways.

### **The Karbi Lammet Amei**

The Karbi Lammet Amei or Mikir Literary Committee, established in 1967 and Karbi Jutang Amei or Mikir Cultural Association established in 1966 are serving the community for the development and uplift of Karbi literature and culture.

## **SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

### **Structure of Social Control, Prestige and Leadership**

#### **Mei**

Much of the old customs of their social organization splendidly survives even in the present day administrative change. The routine administration of each village is run by the village councils known to them as 'mei'. Each council is presided over by a headman or gaonbora called 'sarthe'. All adult males of the village are members of the mei known as Chakri. In mei the number of Chakri are not limited and each one of them take active part in the organization of their village. The district council recognizes the functions and duties of the 'mei'

and it does not interfere with the customary right and privileges of the community and the right of selecting the 'Sarthe' from amongst them.

### **Sarthe**

The Sarthe is usually selected by a consensus from amongst the village elders and as such he is generally in good standing amongst the community and also bears a good moral character: When a person is appointed as 'Sarthe', he gives a feast to his village and pigs and fowl are killed on the occasion. His tenure of office, a post which is honorary is not definitely specified, but depends upon the villagers. If the villagers find the Sarthe a good and efficient one, his service may be required for as long as he wishes to serve, sometime until death. But if he is unfit and incapable of discharging his duties, he is deprived of his Sartheship and another man is selected in his place. The District Council can only recognize the office of the Sarthe, but it cannot retain him or expel him otherwise and go against the will of the community.

### **Sarso**

It is the duty of the Sarthe to summon the member (chakri) of the 'mei' to a sitting and it is he, who puts forward proposals relating to the affairs of the village and the member to give their verdict. The Sarthe can only preside, over the mei but he cannot make any decision without the consents of the other members. Under the 'Sarthe' there are assistants called 'Sarso' (Assistant gaonbora) to help him in his duties and sometimes take over charge of his duties in the event of his illness or absence from the office. The 'mei' fixes the date of the festivals and appeal for voluntary contributions from the community, and entrust every member with particular duty in connection with the festivals. When death occurs in the village, the 'mei' informs the whole village of the incident so that they can go and help in the house of the death, until cremation is over. The 'mei' also tries to settle disputes regarding land, property, adultery assault etc. It may impose fines on the defaulters. The fine varies with the nature of the cases. It does not however,

exceed fifty rupees in any case. Disputes that cannot be settled by the 'mei' are referred to the District Council.

### **'Mei-Pi'**

The 'mei' usually plays an important role in regulating the social, economic and religious life of the community though its power has been somewhat curbed with the establishment of the District Council and all important matter like theft, murder, disputes over land or any property are now dealt with the above body. But the 'mei' still occupies an important place in the social organization and still retains much of its traditional powers in deciding various matters affecting the community as a whole. It should be noted in this connection that some three or four or more villages usually unite together to constitute what is known as 'mei-pi' or a great council. This 'mei-pi' consists only of 'Sarthes' from respective villages and it is presided over by a head 'Sarthe' selected from among themselves and who holds office for a period of one year and may be further reselected for another term depending upon the consensus of opinion of the Sarthes. Serious matters such as charges of adultery, attempts at life, theft, or menace of elephant or other wild animals in the neighbourhood are referred to the 'mei-pi' if the matters are affecting a number of villages. Matters which cannot be settled by 'mei' or 'mei-pi' are referred to the District Council.

### **Risomar Terang**

The bachelor's hall or 'risomar terang' where young boys use to sleep at night is still found among the Mikirs in the interior villages of the high hills. Usually the 'Sarthe' or headman of the village will instruct the bachelors of the village to construct a house where they could assemble and sleep at night. Such houses are generally constructed by all the young boys of the village under the supervision of the 'Sarthe'. Membership to the 'risomar terang' is open to all young boys in the village irrespective of Kurs or sub-Kurs. Generally a boy after attaining ten years of age ceases to sleep with his parents at

night and comes to sleep along with other youths in the bachelor's hall. As soon as a man gets married, he ceases to be a member of the 'risomarterang'. Other persons whether married or unmarried, who are not members of the risomarterang are not allowed to enter the hall. The members of 'risomarterang' dance and sing with the accompaniment of the drums or flutes during the festivals or even in ordinary days if they feel like it. The elder boys help the younger ones to learn to play the drums and the flute or dancing etc. The members of 'risomarterang' co-operate with one another in a spirit of mutual understanding and co-operation. Among the Mikirs there is no particular method of gaining leadership or prestige, it a'l depends upon the villagers to select their leader who is efficient and who is capable of discharging his duties and with whom the villagers have good faith. The villages which are near the urban centres, particularly where the majority of the residents of the village are Christian there the young boys of the village arrange a club where they spend their leisure time playing games. Thus in villages which are having the urban influence the 'risomarterang' is replaced by the modern club houses.

## *Life Cycle and Beliefs*

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### **Gods Pleasure**

The Mikirs believe that the birth of a child is in God's hand, Barrenness of a women is looked upon as God's displeasure over the couple and their matrimonial life may be terminated by the couples themselves, however, there are cases where couples have no issue yet they continue to live together happily until death tears them apart. Barrenness in women is believed to be caused by 'So-meme'. A man or woman may remarry after separation but if, again remarriage does not bear any issue, they are either again separated or content to live together if love prevails. Regarding miscarriage or still birth, it is believed that rites and ceremonies performed during marriage have not pleased the god, so they again perform, the same rites and ceremonies as is done during the marriage, after such incidents the blood of the animal, either fowl or goat, which is sacrificed depending upon the economic condition, is poured on a plaintain leaf and offered to god's while its meat is taken by household and friends and relatives.



### **Male Child preferred**

Male children are preferred by them though also the female child is received warmly and with great joy in the family but they also believe that it depends on the will of God who may bestow on the family any sex he desires. Among the Mikirs no prenatal practise or ceremony is performed.

The delivery of the child takes place in the mother's own house with the help of the attendant (dhai). A pregnant women is always treated with respect and is free from doing any heavy work. She is exempted from doing work in the field and also from carrying firewood. She can only clean the house and do her normal cooking work for the period of her pregnancy.

### **Delivery**

There is no professional 'dhai' or midwife in the village. Such work is performed by old and experienced women who are given a place of honour at the naming ceremony of the child (Osamenkeir). When the child is about to be born the expectant mother is made to lie on a mat on the floor and the attendant 'dhai' keeps watch over her. Then everything is prepared for the delivery of the child, that is, a piece of cloth, sharp split bamboo, thread, etc. When the child is born, the 'dhai' cuts off the naval cord with a sharp slit bamboo and a piece of cloth is tied around it. The clothes used by women and the instruments are washed, either by her husband or her close relative like her sister or mother after the delivery. The placenta is buried outside the house by the husband at a corner of the courtyard. There is no ceremonial segregation for the mother remains in bed for only three or four days after birth, by that time she recovers enough to resume her normal vocation. On the day following the birth, friends and relatives came to that house to greet both child and its mother. The naming ceremony of a child known as Osamenkeir is performed after or a week so according to the discretion of the parents and also depending upon their economic condition. In the case of a male child a cock is killed while in the case of a

female one hen is sacrificed as an offering to the god Hemphu. Neighbours and relatives from far and near are invited to the ceremony in which rice, meat and rice-beer (hor) are served to the guests. There is no hard and fast rules regarding naming a of child. Names are given to a child according to the will and liking of the parents. Friends and relatives suggest names for the child which if the parents like may retain for the child.

A Mikir child is suckled by its mother for about a year or so. On approaching the end of this period or when the child is about six months old some rice which has been masticated by the mother, is given to the baby. When the child's teething period is over and all the teeth have come out, normal diet, *i.e.* that which adults take is given. The mother generally carries the child at her back even while she is at work. The child is allowed to crawl on the floor all by itself until it learns to stand.

### **No Initiation Ceremony**

Among Mikir there is no initiation ceremony. Those Mikirs who are educated and those who are living in the urban areas or those who are living near the urban centres take the help of the hospital during delivery and everything goes according to the routine of the hospital authorities.

### **Marriage**

Monogamy is the rule among the Mikirs and polygamy though permissible is rare and no such case was recorded during the survey. Marriage within one's kur is not permissible and they strictly follow the rules laid down by their traditional customs, cross-cousin marriage is generally preferred. Marriage outside the community is looked down by the society and the parents out of disgrace, may drive the boy or girl away from their home. Seduction is rare and if at all it occurs, the girl's parents have to give their girl away in marriage.

**Adultery**

Illegitimacy and adultery is very rare. The case of adultery is usually tried by the village durbar and 'mei' and the guilty pair are tried publicly thus subjecting them to the jeers and scorn of the neighbours. They are released only after the fine imposed by the council is paid. The amount of the fine usually varies Rs. 25 to 80, depending on the case and the decision of the mei'. The accused is fined and the amount is given to the injured wife or husband. The husband of the erring wife may take her back but he may also refuse to do so even when they both have children and in such cases, the children stay with the mother after separation. In such cases the husband takes a gourd of rice beer, and present it to her parents and declares himself free, after which she has to return all presents given to her by the husband. After the divorce, both parties can remarry and the ceremony is usually performed in the same way as is done during the first marriage.

**Teron and Ingti**

The marriage between Teron and Ingti is not possible since they considered them to be of the same family but a boy of Mikir sub-kur of Teron can marry an Ingti girl, this is the only exception since they do not regard this union as incestuous though such marriages are very rarely observed and the reason on the account for such restriction could not be ascertained apart from the above restriction any kur can marry any other kur other than its own.

**Marriage Age**

The average age of marriage for the boys is between 20-25 years and for girls 14 to 20 years. The table on the next page shows the age and marital status of the Mikirs according to 1961 Census of India, 1961 ; Assam, Part V-A, p. 242-43).

TABLE  
Age and Marital Status of the Mikirs

Age Group	Total Population		Never Married		Married		Widowed		Divorced or Separated		Unspecified Status		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
All	121,082	62,827	58,255	33,372	32,780	27,311	21,716	1,914	3,384	137	245	93	67
Ages													
0-14	55,046	25,767	29,297	25,736	29,187	—	101	—	1	—	4	31	4
15-44	45,417	24,893	20,524	7,369	3,513	16,668	16,243	724	591	96	127	44	50
45-and Above	20,459	12,036	8,423	138	78	10,649	5,427	1,190	2,791	41	117	18	10
Age not stated	142	131	11	129	2	2	5	—	1	—	—	—	3

The table shows that in the age group 0-14 years, 101 females were found to be married, thus they are in the prescribed age limit for females while in the case of males none is found married in this age group. In the 0-14 year age-group which shows 101 females it does not give any clear indication whether the females belong to the latter year or in the earlier years of this age-group so it is difficult to decipher whether the child marriage is practised among them or not.

### **Kur**

As a rule at the time of marriage negotiations both parties concerned keep in view the name of the principal Kur in making the decision. This is done so as to observe the strict rules of exogamy. The descent is patrilineal and marriage is patrilocal, that is, the wife goes to stay with her husband after marriage away from her own parents.

### **Akejoi**

If a young man fancies a girl he informs his parents who go to this girl's parents and propose the marriage of their son with daughters, though such cases were not very frequent in the former time, which is also known as 'akejoi' type and which is now-a-days preferred by the Mikirs.

### **Akmon**

The other type of marriage is of 'akmon' type that is marriage by contact or agreement, where the husband stays in his father-in-law's house and work for him for one year or more and sometimes for life according to the term of agreement. Such types of marriages are usually observed where the girl is an heiress or if she is the only daughter.

### **Suinkeba**

The boy's parents will go to the girl's parents house and propose the marriage of their son with their daughter. If the girl's parents agree to the proposal, the boy's parents give a

betrothal ring or bracelet to the girl. This is known as 'Suinkeba' or formal engagement. Sometimes in lieu of the betrothal ring a bracelet, a gourd of rice beer is offered and if this is accepted the engagement is made. If one of the parties breaks the engagements, the village council (mei) has the power to fine the defaulting party. In the present day the fine usually ranges from Rs. 20 to 50. In the British days the fine was equivalent to 20 to 502 anna coins, when the fine is realized it goes to the injured party and the betrothal ring is returned to the boy's party when the formal engagement is over then the day for marriage is fixed by both the parties according to their convenience. On the appointed day the parties prepare rice beer (hor) and husk some paddy to be served to the invited friends and relatives. If the bridegroom's party happens to pass through some villages on its way to the girl's house, the party has to give a gourd of rice beer to the village headman or Gaonbora through which it passes. When the party reaches the girl's house, one of its members hands over one gourd of rice beer to the girl's father. There is no particular person who should carry the gourd of rice beer to the girl's house, but usually an old man of the boy's side carry the gourd to the girl's house. Initiated by the girl's father an argument then ensues on the point of the coming of the bridegroom and the offering of the rice beer on the occasions. The bridegroom's father would reply saying that he has brought his son to work for his (bride's father) daughter and hence this offer for marriage. The bride's father would answer back and say that his daughter is unworthy of the groom because she can neither weave nor do any household chores. The groom's party would reply we will teach her ourselves. Next the boy's father asks his wife to enquire of the girl whether she consents to marry the boy, for without her consent, the rice beer cannot be accepted. If the girl gives her consent, the rice beer is accepted and is drunk by both the fathers. It may be noted that even in this stage the girl can still back out from the marriage bargain, in which case she has to pay a fine (varying from Rs. 25-50) imposed by the 'mei' and further she has to return all the present's given to her. This argument etc. which takes place at the evening or night symbolizes the marriage ceremony for that

night. Then the bride will proceed to prepare a bed for the bridegroom in the guest room (kam), but if the groom feels embarrassed he may simply send one of his garments to be placed on the bridal bed as a symbol that he sleeps there.

### **God Hemphu**

While in the next day morning a fowl or a goat (depending upon the economic condition of the girl's parents) is sacrificed by the girl's party to the god Hemphu. This is known as Vurkematha and the sacrifice is done by an experienced man, a male relative of the girl's father usually his brother. This ceremony usually takes about an hour. 'On the plantain leaf rice is kept at one side and when the animal is sacrificed, the blood of the animal is collected and is kept on the same plantain leaf on which rice has been kept. This is then offered to the god Hemphu and is placed outside the porch with the utterance of some chants. The ceremony is followed by a feast given by the bride's father at his residence. The meat of the animal sacrificed is eaten only by the couple while the friends and relatives are entertained with food and drink according to the ability of the girl's parents. After the feast the couple are pronounced as husband and wife. The parents of the girl may accompany her and they can stay at the groom's house and return after 8 days, and during their stay they are entertained with food and drink. The husband with his wife stays in his parent's house until they were able to set up a house of their own. If the marriage is of 'akemon' type that is marriage by contact or agreement, the husband stays in his father-in-law's house and works for him for one year or more and sometimes even for life according to the terms of the agreement. The ceremonies in 'akemon' and 'akejoi' type of marriage does not differ in any way.

### **Remarriage is allowed**

Remarriage of the widow is allowed. Divorce can also be granted when the girl runs to her home after marriage and

refuses to go back to her husband. In this case the husband taking gourd of rice beer to her parents and gives it and declares himself free of the matrimonial bond, after which the girl has to return all presents given to her by the husband. After the divorce both parties can remarry and the ceremony is performed in the same way as is done in the first marriage.

## **Death**

The Mikirs believe that if a man does good deeds in this world, he may go safely to 'chom arong' dead man's paradise after his death, otherwise a man may again be born in this hard ridden world and he cannot have a place in paradise after death unless he lives an honest life.

The Mikirs do not normally bury the dead. Cremation is the usual method of disposing of the dead and it is done after performance of some ceremonies. The cremation ground is always outside the village. However, the body of a still-born child or a child who dies soon after birth, or a mother who dies during child birth is buried without any ceremony. Victims of smallpox or cholera are buried shortly after death, but the funeral rites for the deceased are performed later when the dead body or bones being dug up and cremated according to custom. This is done generally after a week or so according to the convenience of the deceased's relatives. In the case of a person killed by a tiger, the body or his clothes, if found, are buried at some distance from the village because the tiger is supposed to visit the burial place. Such a person even if he has done good deeds during his life time, cannot gain admittance to 'chom arong' or dead man's paradise unless elaborate funeral ceremonies are performed.

## **Natural Deaths**

For natural deaths, the body is generally kept inside the house for one day after death, and if an elaborate ceremony is held the body may lie for as long as three to four days according to the convenience of the family of the deceased. The body



lies in the 'kut' and members of the same kur or clan, sit around the dead body though it may be noted that there is no bar for members of other kurs to come and sit around the body. Generally only the close relatives of the deceased sit around the dead body. The members of the family cook and eat in the 'kam' (guest room). Friends and relatives flock to the deceased's house to console and sympathize with the bereaved family and pay their last respect to the deceased person. The body is washed and clothed by the old men and women of the family as the case may be,

### The Bier

The bier (dola) for carrying the dead body is prepared by the young men of the village to the cremation ground. There is no particular kur or sub-kur or any relatives of the deceased family is associated with the preparation of the dola. The bier is made of wood or bamboo for carrying the dead body and during the preparation of the bier, the men are entertained with 'hor' or rice beer by the relatives of the deceased. When every thing is ready, that is, when the body is washed and new clothes are put on, then the body is kept on the bier and tied to it and the old clothes of the dead person are hung over a bamboo pole called *Jambuliathon*.

### Jambuliathon

The Jambuliathon is a specialized and decorated bamboo pole which cannot be made by any unauthorized person. Only the sub-kur Langue of Teron kur are authorized to prepare the pole by the Mikir society. The pole can be carried to the cremation ground by any relative or friends of the deceased. The bier as well as the pole is then taken in a procession to the cremation ground when the body is detached from the bier and placed on the funeral pyre. The platform (Thari) is a raised portion on the ground, done by means of earth and stone, over which are piled logs of wood for burning the body. The pyre is lit by a male relative of the mother's side. While the pyre is burning no body can weep except the professional

weepers. They are the old women of the village irrespective of kur or sub-kur who usually mourn over the dead person saying complets in praise of the dead person. When the dead body is thoroughly burnt, the mourning party (chorhe atcuses) returns home to partake of the feast given by the family of the deceased. On the following day the house is washed and cleaned after which the life becomes normal.

### **Chomangkan**

After the cremation of the deceased, a death anniversary known as '*Chomangkan*' is performed by the relatives of the deceased about a year or two later or more, depending upon the economic condition of the family concerned.

### **Chom Arong**

It is believed that by performing such ceremonies the dead man's spirit may go safely to 'chom arong' and everything that has been observed after the death is performed again with all the rites and practices connected with it. This ceremony is generally performed by the mother's or father's brother or in the absence by any male relative from either the father's or mother's side. This ceremony generally lasts for three days and the family go to mourning and feast is given to friends and relatives. On the first day of the ceremony, the relatives proceed to the 'theri' to pick up the charred bones of the dead person which are specially kept for this purpose and which are then wrapped inside a piece of white cloth. The wrapper containing the charred bones is then placed inside an effigy (arang) closely resembling the dead person which is specially prepared for the purpose. The effigy is made of sungrass and bamboo.

### **'Arang'**

This dead man's figure 'arang' is then taken inside the 'kut' and laid on the 'palm' (bed). The mourning party (cherhe atum) again go into mourning as if the man has just died.

Then young men from the village go to the 'theri' to prepare a funeral pyre when the 'arang' is to be burnt. On the second day a 'doha' or dance ceremony is held in which young boys or girls are invited. The young boys under the leadership of one on the than called 'duhuide' play with their drums and the girls under the leadership of one of the girls called 'ochepi' dance in the courtyard of the house of the deceased.

### **Risomars**

The dancers (risomars) usually dance in pairs forming a circle, the girl's taking hold of the boy's coat while the boys catchhold of the girls from the belt (vankok). After this performance, the 'risomars' are given rice beer after which follows the shield dance, where only the men take part. The dance reaches a climax on the third day when the great dance 'Kanpi' is performed. During this dance, one of the risomars' who is an expert dancer goes inside the kut and dances before the dead man's effigy. He dances there for about half an hour after which he returns to the party of the dancers. Just before sunset the 'arang' is taken out of the kut and is tied to the 'dola'. Meanwhile the maternal uncle or any other male relative from the deceased's mother's side who is known as 'nihu' kills a pair of fowl after going around the dancing group. If the deceased was married person, then a male relative from the father's side who is called 'ingjir arlo' kills a goat. The cost of fowl and the goat killed by the respective persons is borne by the deceased family. The heads of the animals killed are thrown to the 'risomars' who receive them as a mark of respect. The heads of the animals killed are then cooked and later eaten by them. The rest of the meat is kept to be feasted by those who remain after the burial. The 'arang' is then taken to 'theri' and all the people go in a procession. One of the 'risomars' carry the bamboo post 'Jambuliathon' stuck with the dead man's clothes walk in front keeping step to the beating of the drums.

Then follows a group of 'risomars' and the deceased's males relatives who carry the arang. Next comes other relatives and

friends. On the arrival at the 'theri' the 'arang' is untied and placed on the funeral pyre, The pyre is lit by a male relative of the mother's side and at the same time the professional weeper (charhe atum) mourn over his death, recall his past life and pray to the gods (arnum atum), to guide the deceased on its way to 'chom arang' without hinderance on the journey. Then a dance follows where the risomars usually dance in pairs forming a circle the girls taking hold of the boys' coats while the boys catch hold of the girl's from the belt (Vankok). After the dance all return home. When the party reaches home, a feast is given by the members of the deceased's family in the deceased's house. On the following day the house is washed and cleaned and the life becomes normal.

### **Christian Mikirs**

The Christian Mikirs who are in fairly good members(12,443 persons in 1961 Census) belong to the Baptist Church and live their life according to the tenets of Christianity. The ceremonies followed and performed by non-Christians whether in respect of birth, marriage or death are not at all followed and performed by Christian Section of the population.

Among the Christian Mikirs in the case of a child birth though delivery may be performed by a local dhai as in cases of non-Christians, no other ceremonies are performed. Baptism or the naming ceremony of the child according to the Christian rites are performed when the child is one month old or so. The child is taken to the church and there the pastor pronounces the name of the child already selected by the parents and blesses the child. The parents may give a feast at their house with rice and meat or tea to friends and relatives, so as to honour the baptism ceremony of their child.

### **Marriage of Christian Mikirs**

Regarding marriage, the boys and girls have free choice to select their mate and when the boys and the girl have decided to marry, will inform their parents who settles the marriage negotiations. The boy's parents may go to the girl's parents

and make an offer for marriage. If the girl's parents accept the offer, the marriage is fixed and settled. If the offer is rejected, the boy's parents will make an offer to another girl and marriage will be settled by mutual consent and agreement of both the parties. Before marriage is to be finally settled the boy accompanying his father and his relatives will go to the girl's house and there the pastor of the local church will make the formal engagement and fix the date of the marriage. The marriage ceremony is performed according to the christian rites in the church by the pastor, who pronounces them as husband and wife, after both of them make an oath to live and to have each other 'from now and forever'. The marriage ceremony is always marked by a big feast in the girl's house in which rice and pork are generally served to the invitees. On the following day the husband will take his newly wedded wife to his own house and there they start life as husband and wife.

### **Deaths Among The Christian Mikirs**

As regards to death among the Christian Mikirs, the corpse is not cremated but is buried instead. When a person dies, the church bell rings and thus announces the death of a person. The dead body may be inside the house for 2 or 3 days according to the wishes of the deceased's relatives, during this period neighbours, friends and relatives come to the bereaved family to share their sorrow and to console and comfort them. The young men of the village prepare the coffin and dig the grave. The burial ceremony according to Christian rites generally takes place before the coffin is lowered down in the grave after that all who accompany the deceased's coffin to the grave will sing a hymn and say a prayer for the departed soul. A wooden cross is generally erected over the grave bearing the name and the date of birth and death of the deceased. In some cases stone inscriptions are erected over the grave.

## *Family, Clan, Kinship and Inter-Community Relationship*

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### **Nuclear Family**

The Mikir family is of simple type that is a nuclear family consisting of husband wife and unmarried children. The joint family that is, where married children live along with their parents, if found, is only for a short period, because according to their usual practise the married children usually set up a house of their own, but presently there is no such compulsion particularly among those who are living near in the urban centres, where joint family is not uncommon due to the economic pressure. The size of the family (nuclear family) usually consists of 4-6 members, sometime very large families, with more than 8-9 members are not very infrequent.

Generally the father is the sole authority in the family. In the absence of the father the eldest son, if an adult, shoulder the responsibility and takes full charge of the family. The mother is the mistress of the house next to the father and is

much respected. Both men and women enjoy equal status in the family as well as in their society save for the inheritance of property where the son is the heir.

### **Patrilineal**

The Mikir society is patrilineal and the inheritance also follows the same line. On the death of the father, the eldest son if unmarried, takes over the responsibility of the family and also inherits the property, otherwise the responsibility of the family falls on the younger son. Generally the father divides and allots the property among his sons during his life time giving the eldest one the biggest share, this is because he has to take the sole responsibility after the death of his father. In case there is any dispute of the parents with the eldest son then the younger son inherits the property and also shoulders the responsibility of the family after the death of the father. Daughters have no claim at all to the father's property, but they share the property of their mother who distributes her property like clothes, ornaments equally among her daughters, during her life time. Immovable property like land is distributed equally among sons during the father's life time. In case any dispute may arise in this regard, the dispute is referred to the mei (village durbar) whose decision over the matter is always taken as final by the parties concerned, such cases are, however, rare and the sons are generally well satisfied with what they get according to the provisions of the will made by the father. In case the father does not have any male issue, his property passes to his male relatives, generally to his brothers, who divide and distribute the property equally among themselves and under no circumstances shall his daughters inherit the father's property. It is duty of the sons or the male relatives to look after the well being of the daughters of the deceased, who are looked after in this manner as they are unmarried. Similarly, the wife of the deceased is also cared for as long as she stays a widow. If she remarries she automatically loses her claim. The laws of inheritance are governed according to the age-old customs and the community never dream of seeking a change or upsetting the order of the things.

Possibly the earliest account regarding the sub-divisions of the tribe is given in the Census report of Assam 1818 (p. 81) as follows :

### **Divided into Tribes**

“The Mikirs are divided into three tribes, namely, Chinton, Ronghang, and Amri where of the first ranks higher than the third, because Amri excused itself from sending a man on the dangerous embassy to the Ahom king in Sibsagar, when a representative was required from each tribe. Hence Amri is excluded from sharing the liquor at a sacrifice, and is held in contempt by the western Mikirs especially. These latter are fourth tribe called Dumrali by the Mikirs and Tholua by the Assamese and from the fact of their acting as interpreters to the embassy, we may presume that they had been settled in the Assam valley for sometime. All four tribes, as it seems have the same divisions, a phoides, with in each of which marriage is interdicted.”

Allen (1905) does not subscribe to the views expressed in the report of the Census of Assam 1881. According to him they are divided into four tribes Chintong, Ronghang, Amri and Dumrali and these tribes are again sub-divided into various exogamous groups.

### **Sub-groups**

It may be mentioned that in both the earlier account the authors have taken the sub-groups as tribes, but actually they are the sub-groups of the parent tribe, which are distinguished on the basis of geographical areas. Generally the hill Mikirs designate the plains Mikir (i.e. Mikirs staying in Nowgong, Kamrup, Darrang and Sibsagar) as Dumrali, while the plains Mikir call the hill Mikirs as Chintong and Ronghang, but the distinction between Chintong and Ronghang, could not be ascertained since the present day Mikirs (of N.C. Hills) are not very sure as to which geographical area represents Chintong and Ronghang. These division of the tribe based on the



geographical areas were made centuries back, and the names of the divisions are simply running down through generations.

The Mikirs are divided into four endogamous groups namely, Chintong, Ronghang, Amri and Dumrali and these are again sub-divided into various exogamous groups or 'kurs'. It is to be noted that all these four groups are sub-divisions of the parent tribe based on geographical divisions and do not form separate entitles.

According to Pakrashi (1953) the Kurs are the exogamous groups of the Mikirs and sub-kurs are the parts of in number the larger groups that is, Kuis. The sub-Kurs are the parts of in number under each principal Kur. According to him each sub-division or sub-kur is distinguished by a special sub-name attached to the name of the original Kur, and there is no precise rule in adding a sub-name. Thus it is difficult to define sub-kurs except as special sub-names attached to the names of Kurs. The kurs can be identified through the sub-names or sub-kurs attached to it.

Pakrashi (1953) has given a comparative account of the Kurs and Sub-Kurs. According to Pakrashi (1953) the Mikirs have the following main exogamous groups of Kurs as E-jang, Timung, Ingti, Terang and Teron. A few names of the sub-kurs under the different Kurs as collected by the different workers Stack, Moore, Dundas and Pakrasi are given below : (cf. Pakrashi : 1953) for reference :—

	<i>Stack</i>	<i>Moore</i>	<i>Dundas</i>	<i>Pakrasi</i>
Kurs	Lekthe	E-jang	Inghi	E-Jang
Sub-kurs	Hanse	Hanse	Hanse	Hanse
	Tutso	Tutso	Tutso	Tutso
	Bongrung	Bongrung	Bongrung	Bongrung
	Kramsa	Kramsa	Kramsa	Kramsa
		Rongpi	Rongpi	Rongpi
		Ronghang	Ronghang	Ronghang
		Lekthe	Lekthe	Lekthe
		Rongchelon	Inghi	Inghi
		Keap		Kean

## Exogamous Groups

Thus the Mikirs are divided into 5 main exogamous groups or Kurs (Pakrashi, 1953). It is evident from the list of the Kurs and sub-kurs that the information regarding the sub-kurs under the Kurs presents some difficulty. As E-jang exogamous group has been represented by Stack as *Lekthe*, which appears to be on the other hand as sub-kurs of *E-jang*. Lyall stated that the *Lakthe* exogamous group is said to have been the military clan (cf. Pakrashi (1953) which could not be confirmed by Pakrashi. According to Lyall (cf. Pakrashi 1953) the people belonging to *Timung* exogamous group represented no special status like that of the *Lethe* people.

Moore and Dundas referred to the *Ingti* exogamous group as *Ni-e* and *Kather* respectively.

According to Pakrashi (1953) *Ingti Kur* is the superior exogamous group according to the origin of all kurs of the Mikir. According to Lyall (cf. Pakrashi 1953). *Ingti* is said to have been in former times the priestly class. The exogamous group *Terang* as stated by Stack and Pakrashi has stated by Moore and Dundas as *Lo-e* and *Be* respectively. According to Stack, the *Terang* people claimed the dignity of the priestly clan but the informants of Pakrashi did not support the view of Stack, but they said on the other hand, that that *Tarang* might come next to *Ingti Kur* in status among the Mikirs.

The absence of *Teron* exogamous group from Stack's report suggests that he might have taken *Teron* and *Tirang* to be the same.

Pakrashi (1953) gave the following explanation which might explain the difficulties underlying the precise enumeration of sub-kurs or kurs. As Mikirs are always on the lookout for virgin sites where new rotation of *jhuming* can be performed, the leader of a new settlement might adopt, as a mark of distinction, a new name as a suffix to the main kur name which

he and his family members and followers might adopt. Thus this new community under a new head man might later on be distinguished from the other settlements by the new suffix adopted to the original *Kur* name. The name of the sub-kur might in other wards have been adopted only as a mark of distinction, though retaining the full identity and alliance of the members of the newly formed sub-kur with the corresponding kur.

### **Kur And Sub-Kur**

Each principal 'kur' is distinguished by a sub-kur and the formation of any 'sub-kur' in no way interferes with the intrinsic relation between the main kur and its subdivisions. There is no precise rule in adding a sub-kur, and these sub-names refer in most cases to a certain local individual or objects, e.g, Dera-a place name; kiling a river; Tesang-beachelor's house; Patok, a village headman, etc. The members of the sub-kurs never disregard one another, for they all belong to the same kur irrespective of the apparent difference in the names of the sub-kurs.

Shri Lamkam Teron (1966) in his book 'Mikir Jana Jati' has given the list of kurs and sub-kurs. A few names are given below

#### *Sub-Kurs*

- |    |       |                |
|----|-------|----------------|
| I. | Kur   | 1. Kongat      |
|    | Teron | 2. Lange       |
|    |       | 3. Milik       |
|    |       | 4. Aai         |
|    |       | 5. Chirung aru |
|    |       | 6. Trap        |

## II.

*Kur-Inghi**Sub-Kurs*

- |                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Inghi            | 2. Rongpi           |
| 3. Ronghang         | 4. Hansey           |
| 5. Tiso             | 6. Rongpi chinthoog |
| 7. Rongi amri       | 8. Rongpi rongnang  |
| 9. Rongpi lindok    | 10. Rongpi          |
| 11. Rongchechon     | 12. Ronghi          |
| 13. Rong-o          | 14. Ronghanglindok  |
| 15. Ke-ap           | 16. Lekth           |
| 17. Kebong          | 18. Kete            |
| 19. Durong          | 20. Kelum           |
| 21. Tisorongling    | 22. Tisorongphu     |
| 23. Tisorongche-cho | 24. Tisorongchitim  |
| 25. Tisomotho       |                     |

*Kur-Timung**Sub-Kur*

- |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Phengcho langteroi | 2. Nok bara           |
| 3. Muchophi           | 4. Kling rongphar     |
| 5. Rongphar phura     | 6. Sengnot            |
| 7. Timung rongpi      | 8. Tokbi dera         |
| 9. Timungkiling       | 10. Chalut senot      |
| 11. Kokbi chintkong   | 12. Tokbi ronghangaro |
| 13. Rongpharonghang   | 14. Phangcho-ingnara  |
| 15. Singnar-nuchiki   | 16. Nongdu            |
| 17. Nonglada          | 18. Phangcho Voraru   |

## **Social Organization**

In the social organization of the Mikirs each Patrilineal-patrilocal group is exogamous. The Mikirs always give unquestionable importance to the principal kirs at the time of marriage negotiations, Pakrashi (1953) subscribed to the remarks made by Stack that the children are counted to their father's kirs, and cannot marry within it. They may, however, marry their first consins on the mothers side, and indeed this appears to have been formerly the most usual match". There is no preference for any kir in marriage save that the kir must marry outside its own kir. Formerly when the Mikirs lived in the Khasi hills, intermarriage with Lalungs though permissible was not preferred and was looked down by the Mikir community.

If a Lalung boy marries a Mikir girl, then the children will get the title of the Mikir sub-kir name after the mother, while, if a Mikir boy marries a Lalung girl, the children will get the sub-kir name of the Mikir father. Thus in both the cases the Mikir sub-kir name will be retained by the children. This is because the Lalung is a matriarchal community while Mikir is a patriarchal community. Presently such marriage are very rare. There is no particular association of kirs with particular occupation, though the 'senar', a sub-kir of Timung and the 'milik' a subkir of teron generally practise blacksmithy, also there is no social or economic distinction among the Kirs. There is also no restriction as regards to the taking of food among the kirs and sub-kirs.

## **Kinship**

Among the Mikirs the kinship terms express certain obligations, privileges, rights etc. and these terms are inherently dependent upon the very superstructure of the society. A study of the Mikir kinship terms clearly reveals certain traits, Lyall (cf. Pakrashi, 1955) noted the following facts.

Jealousy and suspicion occasionally arise among the Kirs and when there is a dispute on land between persons of two different Kirs, the members on each side would appear as partisans and sometimes forment to discord. But generally such discords are temporary and are appeased by the members of the 'mei'.

Meetings are sometimes held between the members of the Kir in which the well being of the Kir is more concerned than the welfare of the community as a whole. The different Kirs come together and unite only in cases which affect the village or the whole community as such. The observance of religious rites and other ceremonies are performed in a spirit of mutual understanding and co-operation.

The Christian and non-Christian sections of the population are living in perfect amity and there are no tensions among them. They help one another in times and work hand in hand in their fields. During festivals and other religious ceremonies they invite one another to the party without any distinction. In short, the relations among the different segments of the community is healthy and cordial.

### **Inter-Community Relationship**

The Mikirs who are staying in the urban areas may engage the services of barbers and washermen, tailors, and shoemakers from other communities, but the Mikirs who are far away from the urban centres never employ the services of such persons from other communities except their own. Untouchability is absent and they do not forbid any one who belongs to another community to inter-dine with them or take water from the same well. Inter-marriage with communities other than their own, though not at all forbidden is not very much approved by the society. One such case has been found in Dokmoka, about 52 miles from Diphu where a Mikir boy has married a Boro Kachari girl and they are staying within the Mikir village and they have not been socially boycotted by the Mikirs.

### **Tribal ways of life**

The Mikirs who are living in the hills are more attached to their tribal ways of life than those living in the plains. The Mikirs who are living in the plains are surrounded by Assamese and Bengali neighbours and their long experience and steady contact with them has resulted in certain changes in their customs and manners as compared to the Hill Mikirs. Those Mikirs who are living in the hills have no prejudices with regard to food but the plains Mikirs would never eat the flesh of a cow or buffalo, possibly there are the effects of contact with Assamese and Bengali neighbours. As early as 1891, Mr. Baker (Assam Census Report 1891) noticed a strong leaning amongst the Mikirs to Hinduism. Their dress has also been influenced by their neighbours, so far as the Mikir males of the plains have now-a-days substituted their loin cloth (rikong) for a dhoti and their waist-coat (choi) for a long shirt, while those in the hills retain much of their traditional dress. As regards to occupation, a change from jhuming to wet cultivation is seen among those who live in the plains whereas those in the hills still attach greater importance to jhuming, since even if they are away of it they are not in a position to follow the wet system due to condition of the terrain. Those Mikir who are in the plains and near the urban centres are more in advance than their brethren in the hills, as regards to education. This may not be due to the much educational facilities given to the plains men rather it may be the effect of their contact with the neighboring communities, that is, Assamese and Bengalis. Also another factor is the conservation outlook of the hills Mikir. Mikirs are rather reluctant to accept the change of their social milieu, while their brethren in the plains are apt to adopt changes according to the needs of the time.

## *Dwelling, Dress and Food Habits*

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### **Dwelling**

The Mikirs generally reside in clearing patches of the forests in the hills and their villages are always set up within easy reach of the plot, which they are actually cultivating. Villages are always kept apart from one another in isolated blocks for the convenience of cultivation. The main factors which determine the location of a Mikir village is the nearness to the cultivating plots and to the source of water. Even in a compact village the arrangement of houses are dispersed in such a manner so as to provide space for rearing of livestock and for the kitchen garden of each of the houses. There is no kurwise or sub-kurwise clustering of houses and they are built according to the convenience of the individual. Houses are generally large, and the space of the house looks rectangular and the structure as a whole is raised about 3 or 4 feet from the ground supported by stout wooden posts. The whole structure of the house including side walls is made up of split bamboo finely woven and knitted together so firmly that no mud plastering



of the short is necessary. But now many well-to-do families, particularly those who are living in the urban areas have their houses mud plastered. The roof of the house has slopes on either side thatched with sungrass which is generally replaced after four or five years, when it gets rotten or damaged by natural forces. The floor of the house is covered with knitted bamboo strips which are fastened at each end to the posts which support the roof of the house. The inside of the house is dark except for the scanty light that creeps in through the openings in the split bamboo wall. Generally there is now window or chimney, the main door and the tiny slits in the bamboo walls serve as a source of ventilation. Usually the house is divided lengthwise by a partition into two or three rooms with one portion on one side, these types of houses are usually observed in high hills. In the urban areas the 'L' pattern of the houses which are preferred. The 'L' shape pattern of the house which is observed in urban areas consists of a room meant for outsiders or guests known as 'Kam' which is usually on the right hand side when one enters into it, (left hand side are also not very unfrequent) and where the only door into the house leads to it and the other which is 'kut' is meant for the family.

### **Kam**

The 'kam' is further divided into two by a partition and the outer portion of the Kam opens to the open space in between the Kam and the kut. The hearth is placed in the outer part of the Kam almost touching the wall. The household goods are also kept at the one corner of the Kam. In the 'kut' a kind of platform called 'tobung' is raised about 2 feet high above the floor and runs along the wall. The 'tobung' serves as a sleeping place for the members of the family. There is a fire place called 'mehip' made of three upright stones laying at the back of the 'kut' and by the side of the fire place there is another kind of platform called 'damtak' which is also attached to the wall, where the heads of the family, that is the father and the mother sleep. In this room (kut) also stands a paddy receptacle (ingkro) made of bamboo. Behind the fire

place (mehip) there is a place called 'dambuk' which is attached to the 'damtak' where the young and married girl's sleep. The front porch is known as 'hongkup' in which is kept the lion loom, firewood, baskets, mortar, pertle, and daos etc.

### **Household Equipment**

*Hak* (Basket made of bamboo for carrying paddy and other goods).

*Khailum* (Basket with cover for keeping valuables having two layers—upper made of cane and lower layer made of bamboo).

*Linkhoi* (wooden pot for milling sesame).

*Lamgbong* (Dried gourd used for keeping water).

*Lomhar* (small wooden pot)

*Sobak* (wooden ladel big size generally used for distribution of rice).

*Anthong* (wooden saucepan for keeping boiled rice)

*Kindor* (bamboo basket used for keeping rice at the time of worship).

*Ington* (Bamboo basket for keeping food stuff).

*Burupso* (small cup like thing made of bamboo for keeping dried chilli).

*Sae* (An equipment made of bamboo like seive, used for refining rice beer).

*Harbong* (small dried gourd for offering rice beer).

*Longponsi* (Bamboo pipe used for bringing water).

*Long-Lengpong* (wooden paddy husking equipment along with its wooden stick).

*Therang* (Loin loom along with its accessories).

**Equipment Connected with Economic Pursuit**

1. *Krue* (Hoe for jhum).
2. *Nepak* (Dao).
3. *Nahirangso* (sickle).
4. *Nakanti* (Dao-differs from the former one in structure)
5. *Song* (war shield made of rhinoceros's skin).
6. *Nok* (war sword)
7. *Thai* (Bow and Arrow)
8. *Sir* (Hunting spear)
9. *Paron* (An implement for fishing made of bamboo-like basket)
10. *Choklet* (another implement for fishing made of bamboo)

**Musical Instruments :**

1. *Cheng* Big drum.
2. *Chengbruk* very small size drum like Dambru.
3. *Muri* Wooden flute.
4. *Pangsi* Bamboo flute.

Household goods are of simple variety meant for purpose of utility rather than for decoration. A block of wood is enough to serve as stool (inghoi) to sit on. There are baskets of various shapes and sizes and bearing different names for different uses. They are generally used as cupboards for storing paddy, clothes, ornaments, and other articles of daily use. Bamboo joints each with a node on one end and an opening on the other are used for carrying water and also for keeping powdered chillies, salt, fat of animals, rice beer and other things. Utensils of brass and aluminium are also used. Vessels of

brass pitchers of kerosene tins are also used for storing water. Enamel plates and mugs are also among the utensils possessed by them

### **Dress :**

The dress of both males and females is simple. The males commonly put on a piece of cloth known as 'rikhong' which is wrapped round the loin. Sometime on their heads they wear turbans called 'poho'. Adult males also use a waist coat called 'choi', with a long fringe which covers the buttocks and comes round in front. An endi cloth called 'peingki' is also used by them during the cold season. Generally boys do not put on 'choi' or 'poho' but will sometimes put on 'rikong' along with shirt or with shirts and pants. In some cases adult also use shirts, pants and coats, particularly those who are living near the urban centres. Those who are living in town always wear the European dress, which has become the fashion. Women put on a petticoat known as 'peni' which is fastened by a kind of belt round the waist sometimes with an ornamental girdle of silver coins or usually adorned with figures of flowers woven on cloth called '*Wamkok*' or in some cases with simply a belt made of cotton cloth. Another cloth known as 'pekok' or 'jiso' is used to cover the upper part of the body which is tied under the arms and drawn tight over the breast. Over and above, these cloths one or two pieces of cloth 'jiso' are hung on either side of the shoulders covering the breast. The use of frocks, skirts or blouses are also not very uncommon among the young girls.

### **Long Hair**

Women generally keep long hair and it is straight and tied in a knot (chubi) behind the head. Males cut their hair short and seldom care to comb their hair, if at all they do, they comb it flat. Sometimes old men keep long hair and tie it in a knot at the back of the head just as in the case women (chubi). Nails are trimmed with a knife and teeth are cleaned with a piece of jungle tree usually of *Necm* or *Mangoes* in the interior.

villages. but these who are living in the urban centre or not far away from the urban centres use the modern paste or tooth powder for cleaning the teeth. Footwear is seldom used both among the males and the females particularly in the villages away from the urban centres. The Mikirs who are living in the urban centres particularly those who are office goers use modern footwear.

On ceremonial occasions both males and females will generally put on their traditional dress except in a few cases, especially among the youths who are much influenced by the urban ways of life. The priest (gursur), put on the common dress i.e 'rikong' and 'choi' in normal occasions, but on ceremonial occasions he will put on a dress called 'rikong sales' meaning 'holy dress' which is wrapped around the loin. He also puts on 'choi' on such occasions.

### Ornaments

The Mikirs are very fond of ornaments. Women of post pubertal age and particularly those who are married put on a characteristic silver ornaments known as 'nohangpi'. The ornament is made of silver and consists of three parts, the central shaft, the front part and the rear part. The front and the rear-part of the ornament lies in front and behind the perforated ear lobe respectively. The ornament is a short of cylindrical ringed structure with spiral ridges around it outside. The young girls wear 'Norik' which is much like 'nohangpi' but only it is small in size. It is made of silver and is inserted into the lobe of the ear. Grown up men particularly those who are living in the villages wear 'norik' or ear rings of gold and silver suspended from the lobes of the ear. Women also wear necklaces of leads known as 'lek' and threads of the necklaces are made of silver. The 'lek' are of two types. *Lek pengkhra* where the thread of the silver is round, and *Lek ruve* where flat plate of silver thread is used. Finger ring or 'urnam' and bracclets or 'rol' both of either gold or silver are worn by women irrespective of age. Another form of urnam, is worn by males in general. All these ornaments used by them are

either obtained from the Khasi smiths, or they are purchased from the local markets. The use of either gold or silver ornaments depend mostly on the economic status of the household.

### Tattoo

Tattoo or 'duk' is practised by grown up women only. After attaining puberty they usually draw a perpendicular line of indigo colour most generally along the middle of the forehead, down the nose to the upper lip and chin. This is done only to ward away the evil eyes. No other part of the body is tattooed except the face.

### Staple Food

Their staple food is rice and they eat all kinds of meat with the exception of beef and buffalo. Meat is taken either roasted or cooked after it is thoroughly dried over the fire. Sometimes meat is also dried in the sun. Dry fish is most preferable which they store in small baskets. The following are the common vegetables and fruits and spices which they usually take :

Pumpkin	Benghom
Brinjal	Hepi
Potato	Phurui
Carrot	Mula
Tomato	Bokbok
Watermelon	Thoithe
Yam	Hon
Oil Seeds	Nempe
Chill	Birik
Mustard	Hanjang
Sugarcane	Nok
Jackfruit	Jangphong
Mango	Tharve
Ginger	Hanso
Onion	Hatsum keer

All the members of the family eat together in the same house. Meal is generally taken three times a day, in the morning, at the afternoon and in the evening. At every meal a small quantity of food is usually set aside as an offering (Kathok) to the gods.

## **Hor**

Rice beer or 'hor' is their favourite drink. There are three kinds of rice beer, namely 'arak' which is the strongest variety, 'thap' medium in strength and 'hor' which is mild and ideal for a common family drink. The latter one is their favourite drink and figures prominently in the observance of their ceremonies and festivals. Outsiders and strangers are also offered with it for the sake of courtesy. Generally the adult males smoke in a small tobacco pipe (thenghpong). Tobacco in their tongue is known as *Duma*. Betelnut (kore) and Pan leaf (bikon) are consumed by both sexes.

## **Musical Instrument**

The names of some of the Mikir musical instruments are also given below. These musical instruments are indigenous. The most important instrument is the drum which shows variety of size and shape.

Cheng	big drum
Cheng bruk	Very small sized drum like Dambru
Chengso-so	A musical instrument made of brass metal
Muri	Wooden flute
Pangsi	Bamboo flute
Chang chickli	Big drum
Thekelechang	Small drum
Achang	A kind of Bina

## Recording of Time

The Mikirs generally record the end of the night with the cock's crow which they call 'wokuthoni' or 'wokuththom' meaning the time between one to two or three times of cock's crow. When going on a journey the time is generally recorded by the eating of a piece of betelnut which generally takes fifteen minutes for each piece. This is only in villages where watches are an uncommon sight among the villagers. Those who are living in the urban areas, particularly office goers are found to be having clocks. In interior villages, 'space' or 'adak' is referred to as between the earth and the sko called sining pen longle adak. Generally short distances are expressed in terms of Tharlon (a bamboo pole about 12' length) expressed as so many Tharlon. Long distances are indicated by the distance of a hill in sight, 'inglong' 'isi-inglong' 'hini' khelo, meaning hill, one hill two distance

one hill or two hill distance. They also indicate the space by 'adak' as for example "Sining pen longle adhak" meaning the space between sky and the earth. Generally they measure the weight through the medium of 'holon', a kind of basket 'hag' a big size basket and 'mantung'—a cloth bag which is prepared from Mikir bed-sheet.



## *Environmental Sanitation and Recreation*

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### **Sanitation**

Houses in Mikir villages are not compact, this is so, because each house requires a large open space for the sheds for the domestic animal and for homestead gardens. Generally pigs, goats, poultry and even buffaloes are kept either below the plinth of their 'Chang' houses which are very common in the Mikir villages, while in the urban areas the domestic animals are kept in space just adjacent to their houses. Owing to the keeping of their domestic animals very close to their houses, the areas surrounding the houses always remain very dirty and stinky and rubbish is thrown all around the house as there is no particular space outside the house for throwing the rubbish. Pigs and dogs act as scavengers although their own excreta make the whole atmosphere foul smelling but the people are used to such things and they seem to be not worried about it. Sanitation in the real sense of the term is totally absent in the Mikir villages. There is no drainage system and foul water

finds its way to the village streets and then it serves as a water pool for domesticated animals.

### **Diseases and Medicine**

The common diseases are dysentery, exzema, constidation, malaria, boils and other skin disease. Some of the Mikir name for the common diseases are as follows :

Dysentery	Pokpari
Small Pox	Pi amir or Arnum
Cholera	Mavur or toman
General Fever	Phukeso

In the villages far away from the urban centres they do not much rely on the modern medical facilities but rely on their indigenous medical herbs with which they treat all kinds of disease. There is no particular medicinemmen but the old and experienced person generally the priest used to give medicine to the diseased person. The villages near the urban centres are using the modern medicines, while in the interior villages, where the facilities of the modern medicines are not available, they use the indigenous medicine and worship the god, thinking that the disease is because the god is annoyed with them. After observing the symptom (Deuri) of the disease, the priest suggests the relatives of the diseased, whom to propitiate for the particular disease. Then the illness of a person is taken to be the cause of evil spirits and the priest or gurusur is consulted. It is the gurusur who decides what kind of illness the person falls victim to and decides what sort of sacrifice would be performed to appease the spirits and also the number of animals or birds to be sacrificed. It is only when they fail to cure the disease by sacrifices to the spirits which caused them that, they resort to the modern medicine. Even if the town is far away from the village, they have to go to the town to collect the medicine for the diseased person.

## **Lavatory**

There is no lavatory or latrine. Only nearby jungle offers a good place for the evacuation of bowels where dogs and pigs would swarm for their food and serve as scavengers. The Mikir, who are living in the rural areas are having lavatory or latrine at one corner of their house away from the main rooms. The village people do not care to clean their clothes and generally they will do so only on occasions like festivals or other ceremonies. Usually they put on the same clothes every day until it is in such a condition that it cannot be worn by the person any more due to its torn condition. They will only wet their feet and face to soothe away their fatigue and weariness after coming from their hard days work in the fields. Cooking utensils and dishes are washed after every meal. Their houses are dark and one cannot see what is inside unless he is accustomed to the darkness. Doorways and in some cases windows or the opening in the walls serve as sources of ventilation and as there is no chimney the smoke, is like a cloud in the ceiling of the house until it is forced by the wind to come from outside through some opening.

## **Recreation**

Mikir men and women work together in their fields from morning until the sun sets and then relax themselves only after coming from the fields, this removes the fatigue of the day's work by sitting around the hearth snapping stories and gossiping about his fields and crops, and the prospects of the coming harvest. When they met with friends and relatives the inevitable subject of crops always comes up for discussion amongst them apart from some family matters or other matters. Though they have to undergo through the rigours of nature which make their life hard yet their hearts are full with hope and joy and they are satisfied with what they have. Sometime they sing in chorus while working in the fields or sing simple melodies while thrashing the crops seems to dispel fatigue and weariness from both body and mind. They are the children of the nature and find music in the winds, streams and woods which fill their mind with much delight.

## **Hide and seek**

Generally boys and girls play not many games, what they play are some of the modern games borrowed from the outside, generally learned through their school mates. Hide and Seek is played by both boys and girls. In this game a seeker will search the party of the boys and girls who are hiding in some secret place and the one who is caught while hiding by the seeker, will play the part of the seeker, thus in this way it goes on as long as the participants of this game wants it to.

## **Foot Ball**

Foot ball is a favourite game among the boys and sometimes teams are formed among themselves for friendly matches, sometimes they take part in tournaments for a cup competition. Indoor games as carrom, ludo and cards are also played by both young and old. Those who have received some education read newspapers, story books etc. or sometimes listen to the radio or the transistor set if, available in a neighbour's house or if possessed by them. The housewives and elderly women are hard pressed with their household chores such as fetching water, cooking cleaning and washing etc. and whatever little time they could spare spent in gossiping with visiting friends and relatives. The young men frequently go during their leisure time for shooting some wild games or fishing in the nearby ponds. The village young men particularly those who are staying in the interior village generally spend their leisure time in a bachelor's house called 'risomar terang' where they play their drums, dance and sing discuss some problems which they come across in their day-to-day life and exchange their experiences.

## **Risomar Terang**

Dancing takes place not only during their recreation period but also during their festivals and death ceremonies. Men and women of all ages who are able to dance join together in the dance with the accompaniment of drums and flutes.

## *Festival, Language and Literature*

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### **Festival**

Of the festivals observed by the non Christian the most important is known as 'Chojun' or harvest festivals. It is usually performed once a year in late December or January after the harvest or once at least after 2 or 3 years according to the convenience. The festival is observed by each and every household and generally last for one day. This festival may be done also by the village as a whole, where every household of the village contributes in cash and kind. Whether done individually or by the village as a whole the ceremonies held are not different in any way. On the appointed day the 'Kurusur' or the village priest takes a pig which is called 'pirthat-aphak' which has been specially kept for the purpose of sacrificing it to 'Thankarnam' or god of the locality, who is supposed to be the giver of good or bad harvest. The pig is usually killed outside the village. The spot where the pig is to be killed, there is an altar called 'duran' is built by the Kurusur. The blood of the

sacrificed pig is collected on a plantain leaf and is placed on the 'duran' along with some cooked rice as an offering to 'Thankarnam'. The meat of the slaughtered animal is cooked and eaten by all those who accompany the 'Kurusur'.

### **Horbong-Arnarn-Kepu**

Another harvest festival observed by them is known as 'horbong-arnarn kepu'. This community festival is generally observed by two or more villages and only the village elders take part in it, that is those who constitute the 'mei' or village durbars of the participant village. The festival is observed sometime in the month of January but that does not necessarily mean that all villages perform it at the same time. The place as well as the date of the festival is fixed by the members of the 'mei' of the participating village. This festival may even be performed after one or two years according to the convenience of the 'mei' or village durbars of the participant village. The festival lasts only for one day. In this festival 'Barithe' or the god of heaven is invoked and propitiated. Fowl and pigs are killed by the 'Kurusur' or by an elderly person of the 'mei' in the courtyard or 'the kup' of the 'Sarnhe' (Gaonbora). The blood of the slaughtered animals is collected in a wooden vessel called 'Anthong' and is offered to 'Barithe' as a token of respect. Two days before the commencement of the festival, all the participating members gather at the house of the 'Sarnhe' at night to prepare rice beer and to husk paddy. On the appointed day the 'Kurusur' performs the sacrifices of the animals after which the meat of the slaughtered animals are cooked and eaten by the participating members. Thus eating and drinking continues at the house of the 'Sarnhe'. Sometime drinking reaches an excessive stage leading to petty drunken bouts but these are soon forgotten when the eating and drinking is over.

### **Hachakkakan**

There is another festival known as Hachakkakan which is performed after the harvest in the month of January or

February and is celebrated by the whole village as well as individually depending upon the economic condition of the individuals. The festival is more common among the hills and is performed at night. In this festival the young boys of the village dance and sing in a circular form. The leader of the boys who are participating in the dance stand in the centre and sing, he is known as Lunse. The boys make a circle around Lunse and dance along with the rhythmic song of Lunse and move with a circular fashion performing different styles and movements of the hands and body. The songs are not accompanied by any musical instrument. The singing and dancing continues throughout the night until dawn comes, when the dancers get exhausted and retire. When the dancing is over the villagers who collect to see the dancing return home and take rest and eat, drink and make merry.

Among the Christian Mikirs Sunday is a sacred day and every body exempt from work on this day to attend church services. On this day the pastor or any elder of the church will preach from the Bible and utter prayers and hymns. Services are also held in the house and with the same rules of preaching. Christmas and New Years are the two festivals observed by the Christians. Christmas is associated with the birth of Christ which is observed at the mid night of the 24th of December ; the moment is announced by the beginning of the church bells at that time and the people come to attend the church service in which songs, prayers and hymns are performed. This is followed by merriment and feast. The new Year day is also celebrated with much merry-making. On the night of the 31st December just at 12 o'clock the church bell rings and thus announces the beginning of the New Year, which is welcomed with much merriment, and songs and Prayers are held in the church and the pastor or a church elder delivers a sermon. The day is marked with joy and merriment and the church members, young and old have a dinner party of rice and pork, on a voluntary contribution either in cash or kind.

## Language

According to Lyall (1908) the language spoken by the Mikirs belong to the great family of Indo-Chinese speech called 'Tibeto-Burman'. In the Linguistic Survey of India by Grierson (1904-1928) it is considered as a member of the Naga-Bodo sub-group in which it is classed together with Empco, a Kaccha Naga and Kabui and Khoisao. He has also given a grammatical sketch of the Mikir language, which was the first published attempt to explain the fact and mechanism of the language.

## Script

Mikir has no script of its own. The first publication printed in it, a short catechism issued by a missionary press at at Sibsagar in 1875, used the Assamese script, since then, so far as is known the Roman alphabet has always been employed to express the sound of the language. The Gospel History written in Roman alphabet entitled 'Birla Kema' (Glad Tidings), was published in 1904 by the American Baptist Mission Press. Their folk tales are lively and the Themes have been appropriated and assimilated to the social conditions of the Mikirs. It appeared that during their sojourn in the Khasi hills, the Mikirs had assimilated much of their customs and manners. Not only dress and ornaments but the methods of divination and funeral ceremonies and memorial stones and also personal names are all borrowed from Khasis. The Khasis have also contributed many words to their common speech, for example, the prefix 'ka' in women's names is manifestly taken from the Khasi usage. According to Lyall (cf. Report on the Census of Assam, 1881, p. 78) there are sufficient indications to declare Mikir to be the Kinsman of Bodo rather than Khasi.

## Literacy

So far as literacy is concerned, the majority of Mikirs are illiterate. The 1961 Census (Census of India, 1961, Assam ; p. 282-302) reveals that out of the total population of 121-282 persons, 106,394 or 87.8 percent are illiterate out of which



51,612 are males and 54,782 are females. The literates without any education level accounts for 7,345 males and 2,746 females, 3,849 males and 721 females have primary or junior basic education and 21 males and 6 females have matriculation or higher secondary standard when compared with the general education of the State as a whole, the percentage of literacy of the Mikirs is 27.4% and with the general education of the scheduled tribe as a whole the percentage of literacy of the Mikirs is 23.6%. A good percentage of educated and literate persons are met within the urban population, which speaks of better educational facilities in the urban areas.

### **Books**

Below is given a list of the Books published in Mikir language.

1. Achamab Akitap
2. Kalakha Akitap
3. Haa-li
4. Brukachen
5. Cheb Langtham
6. Admmchas
7. Karbi Ka'puchan
8. Chakarbi akur Akitap
9. Karbi lamburu
10. Kacharha akitap
11. Char lamthe
12. Rong keche
13. Karbi Bhasar Chamu Parichaya
14. Mikir Jana Jati
15. Tam hidi
16. Kitap kuni

# ZEMI NAGAS

## PART III

## *Introduction*

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The Nagas have come a long way since the British first came in contact with them in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and took defensive measures to protect British subjects and the tea plantations from raids' by hostile. The Nagas are now *equal partners in the Union, with the formation of the Nagaland* by joining the three hill districts of Kohima, Mokokchung and Tuensang in to India's seventeenth State.

### **Mountaneous Tract**

An expanse of forests, mountains end streams, the State 6316 square miles in area with a population of about 4 lakhs, has more than 30 tribes with different customs dialects and religious practices. Many of them are converts to Christianity. Of mixed origin, slant eyes' straight hair and rather flat noses.

### **Head Hunter**

How did the Nagas get their reputation for headhunting ? The custom springs from the belief in a soul force capable of

bestowing vitality to an individual or community. Each community is said to possess a certain quantum of soul force which decreases with time, and has to be replenished if the tribes are to be healthy and prosperous and the harvests remain abundant. By keeping skulls in the house, the Nagas believe this soul force is augmented. Some anthropologist, however, state that this scalp-hunting is a form of vendetta.

## **Martial Race**

A martial race, the Nagas built their houses with defence possibilities in mind. The villages were sited on mountain spurs and surrounded by bamboo palisades or stone stockades. The eminence gave the Nagas a panoramic view of the countryside and kept them prepared for sudden attacks from other tribes.

## **Houses**

The hearth is the centre of the Naga household and family and friends gather it to chat or partake of food. It is here that decisions are made. The chores are divided among men and women, the latter fetching water and attending to domestic duties. The men work in the fields on the hill slopes, where their women folk occasionally help them. There is a fair amount of rainfall, about 80 inches, and rice and vegetables are cultivated. In the plains sugarcane, papaya, pineapple and oranges are grown.

## **Jhoom**

Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. The traditional form of farming is known as Jhoom, a shifting system of cultivation. Every year trees in a part of the forest are cut, the area cleared, sown with seed and a bumper crop harvested. This piece of land is allowed to lie fallow. It is cultivated again after a lapse of time. A fresh piece of forest land is farmed the following year.

Milk as a food-even for nursing mothers and children-is relatively unknown. Instead, rice gruel is taken frequently. Milch cattle are consequently few. The Nagas are fond of meat and are not averse to eating the flesh of any animal. They relish the flesh of snakes, field rats pigs, cats, dogs and the mithun, a cross between a bull and the yak. Animals, brought by the Nagas from the plains of Assam, are herded into the villages for slaughter. They have a simple way of cooking, meat, dispensing with spices and fat. This renders the flesh particularly rich in protein. Fish, whenever available, is popular among Nagas and is also dried and stored for use during lean periods. The food is washed down with liberal quantities of spirits-zau and Dekrizau.

### **Dormitories**

Special dormitories for boys and girls known as morungs, and under the supervision of trustworthy old couples, still exist in some villages. The dormitory serves a dual purpose. It is a sort of cultural centre for the preservation of music, dance, and artistic expression of the tribes, for the youths learn the rudiments of the arts there. It is also a kind of military camp. Since the single men are located at one place with ready access to arms they can in an emergency be called upon to defend the village at any time of the night. The young men have their gayer moments too. They visit other morungs as far as ten miles away to seek the company of the opposite sex and engage in amoral dalliance. Pre-marital taboos are few and the children born of such liaisons are not frowned upon but accepted in society and are looked after, generally by the mother.

### **Democratic Practices**

The Nagas are well disposed towards newly married couples. The bride and bridegroom are helped by the villagers in setting up a home built on a piece of land allotted to them and which, incidentally, is owned by the village and not by individuals,

Indeed, the Nagas have certain democratic practices where the interest of the community is placed above that of the individual. The co-operative system functions at all levels and for practically every purpose, from building a house to harvesting crops. The whole village gives a helping hand when a major chore has to be done and in return the workers receive free food and drink. Occasionally, the rich provide a feast for the villagers and are then entitled to a sort of status symbol—displaying a sign outside their houses.

Game trophies and heads of the mithun are also prominently hung in the porch. The Nagas have a crude but effective way of curing heads—burying them for a period of time so that the flesh falls off leaving the heads fairly decent looking. The whole village takes part in the hunt, either as beaters or hunters whenever the summons for a chase is given. Though eager to possess guns, the Nagas make the best of their primitive weapons and are capable of killing even big game with spears, daks or bows and arrows:

Their main sport being hunting, they are adept in trapping animals, wild bears, elephants and even tigers. All game meat is equitably distributed among the poor and the better off. It is often smoked and set aside for future use. On festive occasions the killing of a fattened mithun which is tied to a post is almost a ritual—although a cruel one. Instead of shooting it outright the Nagas resort to disposing of it with a dak, one limb at a time, eventually severing the head.

Besides the tribes within state boundaries, there is an overflow to the neighbouring States of Manipur and the North Cachar Hills of Assam. They claim kinship with one another though their dialects differ. Predominant among the Naga tribes are the Angamis and the Rengma from Kohima, the Semas and the Aos from Mokokchung and the Phoms and the Changs of Tuensang.

All the tribes take pride in martial activities and tend to fight at the slightest provocation. Some of them have joined

the Indian Army. Many members of the Ao tribe have taken to business. The Aos are generally more educated and advanced than other tribals. Ao girls wear modern, fashionable clothes and look smart.

There is much missionary activity among the Nagas. Christian priests of various denominations work there with American Baptists in a majority. There are also many Roman Catholic missionaries. Christianity has changed tribal marriage customs and the mode of life. Parents now prefer to keep their children at home rather than in the morungs, and send them to school.

The Sansaris, however, retain their customs and beliefs. The Phoms and the Changs in the interior of Tuensang dispense with clothes altogether. However, contact with the plains people obliges them to cover their nakedness but even so they wear the minimum number of clothes. The climate is pleasant so that there is no real necessity to wear clothes in summer ; even the winters are mild.

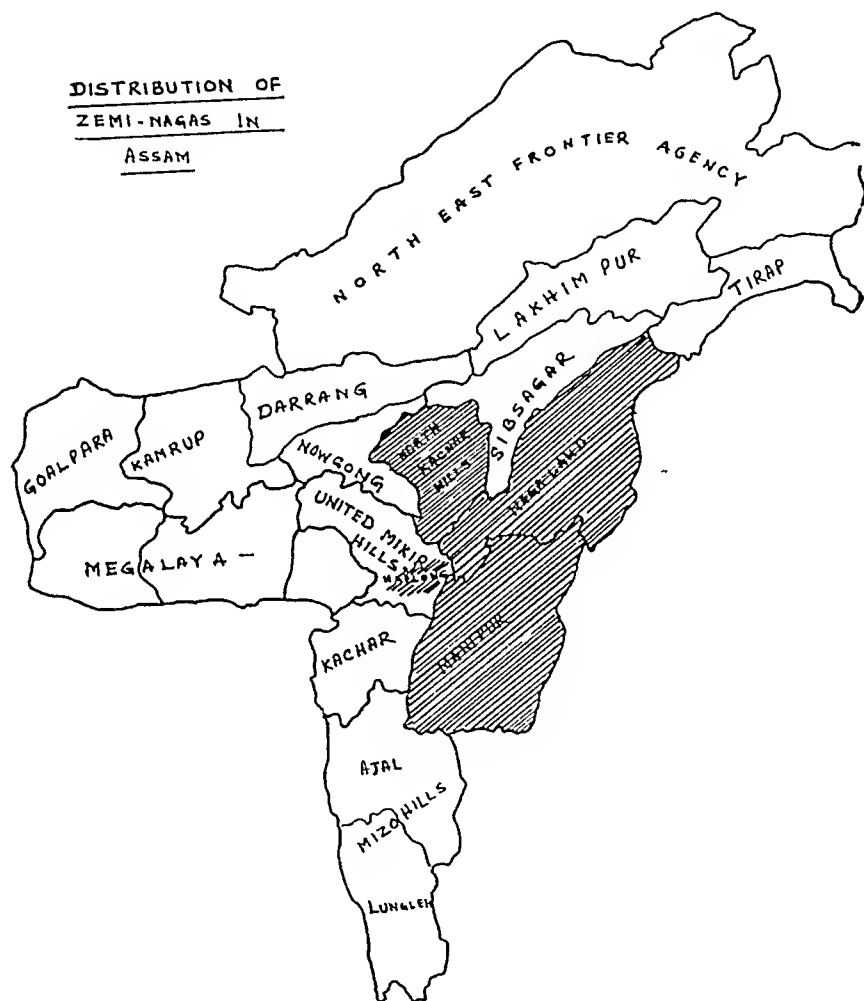
## **Dress**

Tribal dress and accessories are eye-catching. The red blanket, a symbol of office of the headman (Gaon Burra) and a red jacket that of an interpreter (Do-Bhashi), are worn with pride though little or no monetary benefit accrues to the wearer, except possibly signifying a position of authority and prestige.

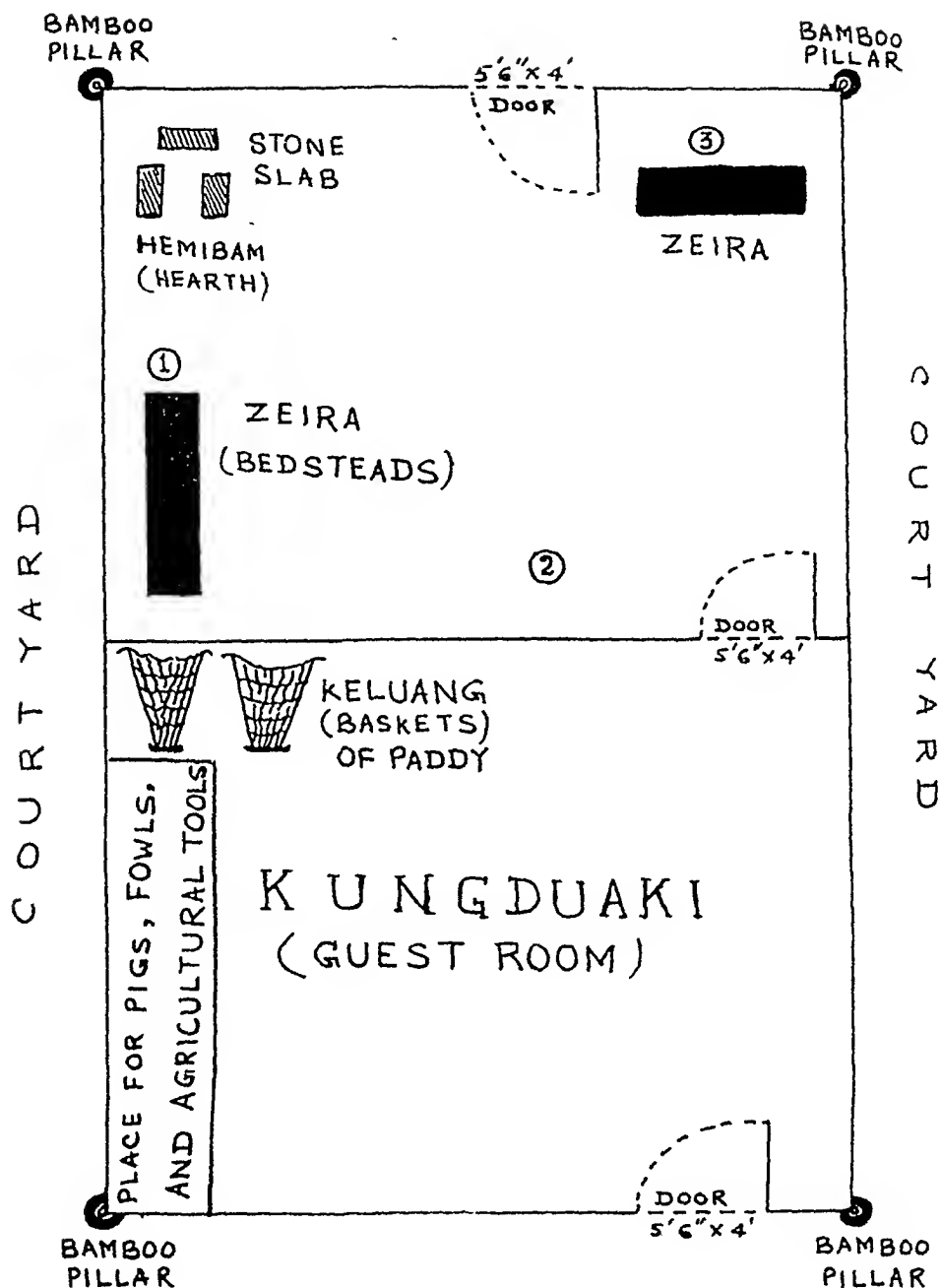
In the interior, communications are still primitive though road building efforts are in full swing. Unlike other parts of India, the villagers can be entrusted with the responsibility of constructing and maintaining and if necessary, guarding the portions of road passing through their area.

Bus services only extend to the district headquarters. The Nagas still covers long distances on foot despite the heavy loads they bear. Of course, they like to ride in a bus and their pleasure in this quick and comfortable form of transport is evident.

DISTRIBUTION OF  
ZEMI-NAGAS IN  
ASSAM



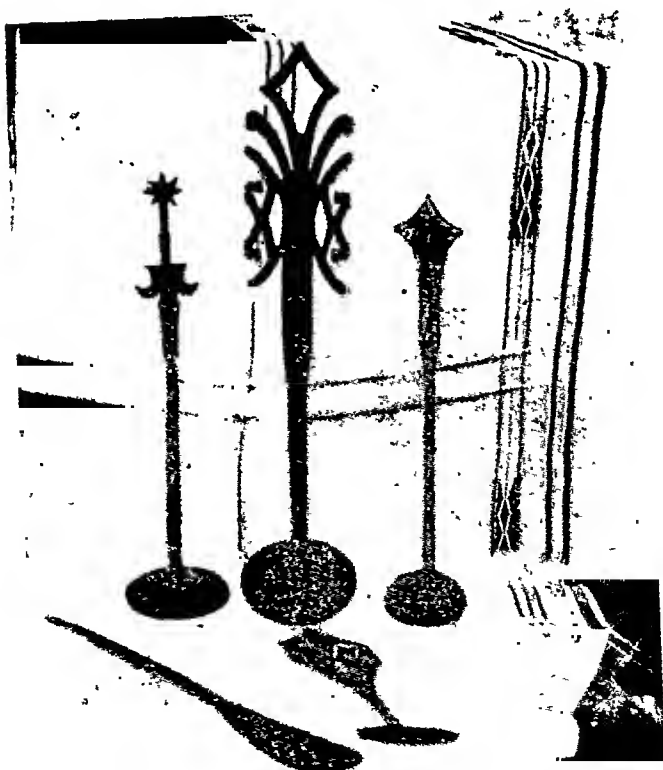




HOUSE PLAN OF ZEMI-NAGA



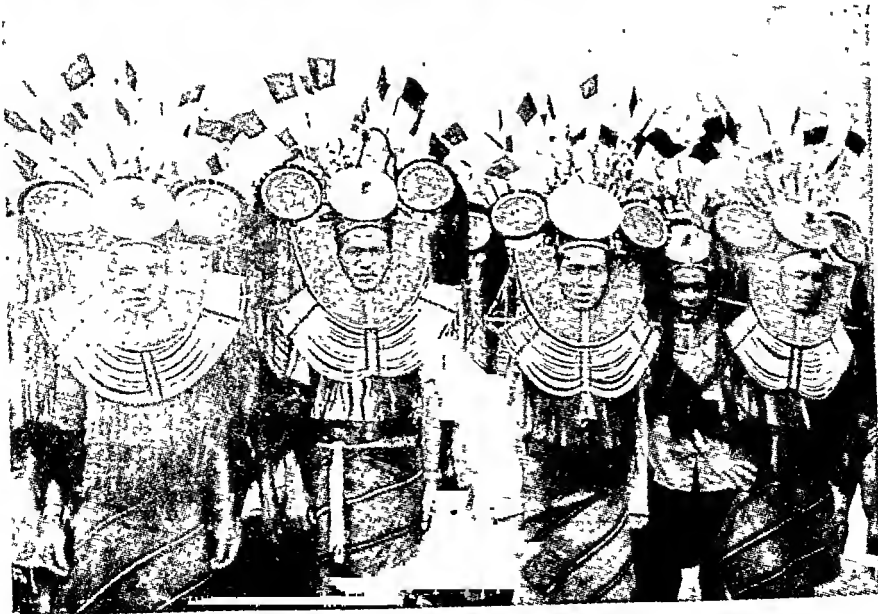
*A Village near Lungleh*



*Naga Art on Utensils of daily use*



*A Naga Chief*



*Naga Tribal Chiefs*

*Portrait of  
Naga Tribesman*



*Naga Tribesmen*



*An Naga in  
Ceremonial dress*



*Portrait of Naga*



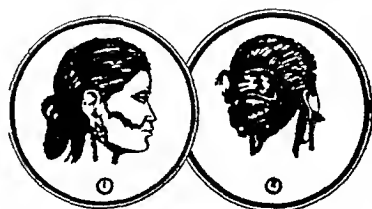
*The Naga Warrior*



*Tribal Girls Demonstrating the paddy husking dance (Naga)*



*Naga Utensils*



*Naga Women's Hair Style*

## **Doctor**

The old witch-doctor with his sacrifice of chickens and practice of other rites still holds sway over the country-side. Medical aids are primitive. The cure for sores consists in covering them with leaves. The Nagas, being hardy, shrug off minor ailments and often manage without modern drugs. Treatment of the sick, the old, and injured persons poses a problem. Young men, however, volunteer to carry the patients for miles and for days together to a hospital for treatment, provided they are convinced that the witch-doctor is helpless and the patient needs specialized medical care.

## **Scenic Beauty**

The scenic beauty of the area strikes the visitor. He can never hope to see the place in one or two trips. It is a paradise for research scholars, anthropologists, botanists and tourists. It is worth a visit especially in the cold season when there is still a lot of greenery around.



## *History of Zemi—Nagas*

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### **Sub-Tribes of Kaccha Nagas**

The Zemis are one of the sub-tribes of the so called Kaccha Naga Tribe according to the Zemis of the N.C. Hills. The word Kaccha Naga has been derived as follows. When the Britishers came to North Cachar Hills near about Dimapur they made *Asalu* as one of the head quarters of the British army. The people living in the Asalu village were the Zemis themselves. From the Asalu head Quarters the District people started to move toward Kohing, but could not succeed due to thick forest. The people of the Asalu village stated that those who live there are all dacoits or *Kahegami*. (meaning dacoits a head hunters in the Zemi language). So the Britishers did not proceed further, but came down to Dimapur, side and entered a village of the Angamis near Kohima called Khonoma. When they entered Khonoma they called the people of Khonoma village as Angamis, (they derived this name from Kahegami, which they learnt from the people of the Asalu village). But the people of the Khonoma village (Angami) even today call themselves Thenemi). The British were enquired from the Angamis of the

Khonoma village, as who are the people living to the western side of Kohima.

### **Kacchas**

The Angamis said that nobody lives in that area but there are only *Kacchas* (Kacch is an Angami word meaning forest). That is in that area there are only jungles and no one lives there. But the Britishers moved and entered inside the western area, that is the Zeliang area at present, to their surprise they found some people living there. The Britishers mistook themselves at the Kacchas, (which they learned from the Angamis of the Khonoma village) and named them as the Kaccha Nagas. According to the available information the people living in those thick forests were the Zemi Nagas themselves, whom the Britishers mistook as the Kaccha Nagas.

### **Western District of Kohima**

Thus Kaccha Nagas are the Zemies living in the Western district of Kohima, while the Zemi themselves are living in the North Cachar hills from a very early time. According to the Zemis of the N.C. Hills there are no marked difference in cultural and social activities of these two groups of Zemis.

### **The term Zemi**

The term *Zemi* means 'Southern' or the plain regions in comparison to the Naga Hills. 'Nzieme' the name by which they call themselves. It is now an obsolete term previously used by the Zemi Nagas of Manipur to refer the Zemi Nagas of N. C. Hills. The word is pronounced with a slight nasal aspirant.

The word has been derived from the root word *Zemena* meaning man.

### **First Inhabitants stated back to 13th Century**

According to the Zemis of the N.C. Hills the first inhabitants of the N.C. Hills were the Siami and Zeme and their

settlement may be dated back to the 13th century. The Siamis were Zemis in general, but since they know the art of making 'Teluiteu'. ('Naga Necklace) out of the soft stones (conches), so the Zemis gave the name as 'Siami' 'Siame' (mean artisans) to those families which knew the art of making necklaces. Their artistic works and stone pillars are still to be found in *Melangpeu*. Boloson, Asalu, Impoi, are other zeme villages of the North Cachar Hills.

### **Kechingpethka**

According to them, since the 13th century Zemis were living on the Borail Hills, before the geographical division of India. This North Cachar Hills was called 'Kechingpethka' (Borailrange). When the Ahoms and the Kacharis invaded this area, they asked the Zemes as to whom this land belong. The Zemes answered that this land belonged to 'Kachingpeka' (that is Boro, or Bara that is elder). They actually meant that this is the home land which belonged to the eldest of the family of 8 sons. Since that time the name Borail (derived from Boro) came into use, which is still being used. During the 16th century there was another batch of Angami Naga migration into Barail Hills. The Zeme Nagas being the weaker groups went away and moved downward and westwards passing through the Borail range, and started colonizing beyond the hill areas.

### **Clanwise Migration**

The Kaccha Naga as a tribe consists of three sub-tribes as follows, the Zemis, the Liangmes, and the Rongmes or the Kabuis. The first two groups speak the same language but little variation in accent and the last group, speaks a different one though there is a good number of words akin to the first two. According to the Zemi Nagas of N.C. Hills all these groups belong to the same stock but later some what clanwise migration had to take place to different parts in search of fertile lands for cultivation. In olden times the Angamis carried on raids against the Zemes who thus had to migrate further and

further away from their original place of settlement till they come down to, Borail range in North Cachar Hills. Thus scattered and separated by economical, political and social forces they had to live in different geographical units like N.C. Hills, Manipur and Naga Land.

### **Same Social Customs**

In spite of the different geographical situations in which they are placed, the social customs and manners of these three-subtribes are almost the same.

The Zemis are the Kaccha Nagas who had been for a long time the virtual subject of the Angami people of Khonoma (Hutton 1921, pp. 352).

### **Different Dialect**

They resemble the ruling people in manners of dress though they speak a different dialect. It is difficult to say what customs and measures are originally of Kaccha Naga and what have been borrowed from the Angamis of Khonoma.

### **Their Origin According to Sir Grierson**

How and when from the Kaccha Nagas come before reaching the present abode is still in mystery. The tradition goes that their ancestors came from the direction of Japromountain in Nagaland (J.H. Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, 1921, p. 352, p. 6) and spread towards the south. They have been connected with the head hunters of the Malay and the races of the Southern sea on the one hand and traced back to China on the other. J.H. Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, 1921, pp. 352, 6).

It has been stated (communication made to the Royal Anthropological Institute, Quarterly from *Man in India* 1948, Vol. 48) that the Zemi Nagas apparently migrated to the present location from the neighbourhood of Mao and Kohima, by a route down the Borail range and reached North Cachar when the Kachari kingdom at Maibong was well established.

On the basis of language, their origin is assigned by Sir G. Grierson (1903) to the second wave of immigration, that of the Tibeto-Burma, from the traditional cradle of the Indo-Chinese race in North western China between the Upper watershed of the Yang-tse-kiang and the Ho-ang-ho rivers.

The Kaccha Nagas of the North Cachar Hills come into contact with the Kacharis (Hutton, 1921, p. 13). The legends of the Kachari king Bhim are still current among the Kacharis. They believe that he is still sleeping in a cave among the hills immediately to the south of the Japro mountain when he will come out at sometime in the distant future to rule over all who eat from the wooden platter (Nagas in general).

The Zemi Nagas of N.C. Hills though know about such a legend which is current among the Kacharis yet do not accept the possibility of a Kachari king ruling over them.

### **Ahomking**

The Kaccha Nagas (E.A. Gait 1963, 1013) were also enlisted in the armies of the Ahom Kings who had relations inter-Manipur. During the thirties of the eighteenth century a Manipuri raid was made into the Angami country (Gait) 1963 as far as Kohima, which the Manipuris attacked and burnt and slaughtered large numbers of inhabitants. The Kaccha Nagas as neighbours and satellites of the Angamis suffered in the same way as the Angamis when the Manipuris raided into the Angami country as far as Kohima.

### **Angami Rule**

The Kaccha Nagas were for a long time under the Angamis Suzerainty and even they had migrated to the area in the North Cachar Hills the fluctuating suzerainty of the Angamis over the Kaccha Nagas was still maintained until the establishment of the British rule. The Kaccha Nagas owe allegiance to the Angamis in that they had to pay a kind of tax during their subjugation which amounted to Rs. 2/-per household per annum.

Over and above, they had to assist them in their devastating raids on the plains. In some cases the Angamis made their settlements in the Kaccha Nagas country and where each settlements were made, the Kaccha Nagas as their subjects had to accept allegiance to the ruling Angamis. But the villages were so made that the Kaccha Nagas were free to pursue their own pattern in matters of village organizations and administration. As a result of such settlements it is but natural that the Angamis would dominate them and hence superimpose on them their own customs, ornaments etc. through the ages.

## *Distribution and Economic Pursuits*

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### **North Cachar Hills**

The Zemi Nagas are found mostly in North Cachar Hills J.H. Hutton 1921, pp.252, 6) and also in Manipur and Nagaland. Those found in the North Cachar Hills subdivision have been living together along with the other tribes like the Dimasa Kaccharis, the Kukis, the Hmars etc. According to the Zemis of the N.C. Hills they come this sub-division from the north-east and migrated down the Borail range and still further to the west as far as to the bank of the Kopilai river. Thus there is long continuous chain of villages, with few kuki and Kumar villages at places from the bank of the Kopili on the west to the eastern border of the North Cachar Hills.

### **Population**

There was no record of the tribe wise population in the 1951 census. The total population of the Zemi Nagas of North

Cachar Hills according to 1961 census was 8338 out of which 4556 are males and 3782 are females respectively.

Since there are no population for the Zemi Nagas separately in the earlier census, so it is not possible to give the population trend.

### **Physical Appearance**

The Zemi Nagas in appearance are a mongoloid race. In most of the cases they have an epicanthic feature, which is unmistakably a characteristic of the Mongoloid group. They have mostly thick black hair : well built, strong and healthy body. (Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Part III, 1900 Vols. LXVIII, LXIX, and LXX).

### **Darker Skin**

The Zemi Nagas who are living in the comparatively hot regions in the N.C. Hill district like Howraghat and Bokakajan ghat some what darker skin as compared to those living in the hills of Haflong sub-division. In general they are short to medium statured individuals with various shades of light brown to fair complexion. It has been seen that the Zemi immigrants intermarried with survivors of a jungle race exterminated by the Kacharis, and darkskinned, frizzly-haired individuals are found among the present day Zemi.

### **Land**

Land, the most important property, can be held by the individual or clan. The waste land of the village, where no structure has been erected by any person belongs to the whole community of a particular village. Each village has also a small patch of forest land and rights to this land belongs to the whole community irrespective of clan. No individual person or clan or family can utilize such village land for the purpose of cultivation or erecting a house. The only benefit enjoyed by them from such land is that any villager can utilize the building materials for constructing or repairing his house.



## **Clan Land**

Clan land is allotted for cultivation by an agreement among the people of the clan. That is a person who wants to cultivate that land or a part of it will approach his clan's members who will sit together and give their consent. In case of disagreement, the person concerned will refer to the village council who would try their best to settle the dispute. Such cases generally ends with the interference of the Kadeipeo and other members of the village council and it is seldom referred to the District council for its final decision.

## **Kadeipeo**

Though the lands within the officially demarcated areas belong to the villages as a whole there are some patches here and there within the boundary which are socially regarded as owned by the Kadeipeo at the time of the original settlement. These lands can be disposed of by the Kadeipeo in favour of any of his relatives or descendants. He may give a part or whole of the land to his daughter or daughters as a part of the dowry for their 'Chingrimiabam', meaning place for collection of fire wood ; when they go to their father-in-laws' house. The land thus given will then be in possession of their family and it will be subject to a traditional levy or tax called 'Mpuā' which every non-Kadeipeo must pay to Kadeipeo in recognition of the latter's right over the land in case the land is cultivated (that too after consultation with him), 'Mpuā' may be measured in terms of crops grown thereon, it may be a basket of cotton, belts, Chillies, rice etc.

## **Full Authority**

The eldest member of a clan has full authority over the clan land. Allotment of land for cultivation may be made by himself as is the normal practice, after consultation with his immediate elders of the clan.

## **Livestock**

Land and livestock are the only factors which play an important part to the economic life of these people. Since their economy is predominantly agricultural the entire social structure is dependent upon the ownership of land and cattle wealth like the buffalo or the mithun, is an important source of income as a consumption good especially during ceremonious occasions. The price of the mithun usually varies from Rs. 20 to Rs. 25 according to the size and thus is a source of income for the owner. The Zemi households in the village makes weaving and basketry for their own purposes. Though these traditional industries are not carried out in a large scale and do not find their way in the market but rather provide a utilitarian object to the producing household.

## **Blacksmithy**

Blacksmithy as a profession among the Zemi Nagas is practised on a very small scale. It cannot be regarded even as part time industry in the village. There are no particular clan or clans who are attached to it. This only is when the cultivators want to improve their agricultural implements like spades, hoes, dao etc. that they resort to this work, and that too, in their own houses, with the help of indigenous accessories. There is no tradition connected with the industry and there exists no class distinction among those who practise it and those who do not. The services of other tribes like Kacharis are obtained and in fact the implements like daos, spears, etc. are manufactured by Kacharis of Maibang in the olden days were considered to be one of the best quality available in N.C. Hills.

## **Shifting Cultivation**

The principle basis of subsistence is shifting cultivation. As the Borail is extremely steep and cliffs and crags abound, the spurs lie close to each other and gorges and deep ravines are in between, the land fit for *jhum* exists only in scattered patches while the greater part is rocky and impossible for cultivation.

Moreover the land can be put to cultivation only for two or three consecutive seasons. It is then left to lie fallow for at least ten years when the land has recovered enough for jhumming. During the period when jhum field is left fallow, the cultivators shift their activities to another plot of land and resume jhumming in the old plot when it is again fit for cultivation.

### **Changing Pattern**

Since as is generally the case there is not enough land for shifting cultivation, it becomes necessary to change to permanent fields by which the same population could live as a fraction of the acreage needed for jhumming.

### **Wet Cultivation**

Wet cultivation, even it is known to them, is impracticable for the simple reason that the land around the Borail hills is unsuited for the purpose. Even lands fit for jhumming are few and far between, being found only in small scattered patches.

### **Clearing Of Jhumming Land**

Usually the land to be jhummed is cleared with daos (heke) or axes (hrei) in the months of December-January and set on fire in March-April. The ashes are thoroughly mixed with the earth and holes are made with the help of the hoe (kepen). The holes are to be made in such a way that the soil is to be upturned, will generally depend on the nature of the soil and the kind of crops (paddy) to be grown. In stormy or sandy jhums the holes are usually made and in soft or laamy areas, the outer crest of the earth is upturned. There are certain kinds of paddy which are harvested late in November-December and are of made sturdy growth and hence require deep roots for their proper growth. For these, holes are generally made even in soft soils otherwise the paddy plants will fall on the ground as they grow in cluster from the same one hole. But some

kinds of paddy which are reaped early in September-October are broadcasted after the soil is upturned, for they are of stunted growth and do not usually need deep roots. At present broadcasting of seeds (after the soil is upturned) is the most popular practice perhaps because of poorer quality of soil and the need for early crops. The methods in practice seems to require less quantity of seeds also. This broadcasting method is possible only in plain or at least on very gentle slopes, while on hilly steep sides, holes are generally made, for the seeds if broadcasted will be washed away down the hill sides by the rains. Sowing begins usually after the first rains, i.e. during the months of April-May. Paddy is the main crop and chillies pumpkins, millet, maize etc. are sown as side crops along with paddy, each in a separate hole. The harvesting of paddy begins in November and lasts until December whereys in the case of maize, chillies, etc. the harvesting period starts in August and that of millet, in October-November. Sickles (*sapinen*) are used to out the ears of paddy and the sheaves so collected are beaten against a stone until the ears are separated from the plant. Husking is done with the help of pestle (*kemi*) and mortar (*gepa*).

### **Cottage Industries**

Though cottage industries like, weaving, basketry and black smithy are practised by the community yet it may not be wise to include them as subsidiary occupations though, of course, they provide a source of income to the producing household. This is due to the fact that the industries are not carried on a large scale but are practised only when occasion arise, as has been mentioned before these products do not find their way to the market but are rather meant for personal use. Of the industries practised by them weaving is the most important and the clothes are meant only for personal use. Of the clothes woven by them the most important are *Menipai*, *Hemi*, '*dimdia*', used by men and *armi*ang, '*peingum*' used by women.

**Ngkum And Hemui**

A small wooden machine called 'ngkum' is used to extract the cotton seed. After extracting the seeds, cotton '*Hemui*'. The spindle is made of a strong piece of bamboo or wood pointed at the bottom and above it has a round flat stone with a hole in the middle through which the wooden stem passes from its upper end. The thread is wound round the wooden stem as the latter spins. The loom (*dekrain*) is a simple ten loom. The warp of moderate length and breadth is made and fastened at the end to a wall while the other end of the warp is tied to the waist, of the weaver with a cotton leather belt. No reed is used and the shed is operated by a half heald process which is also operated by the hand. The weft yarn is inserted in the hed by means of bamboo tube and a wooden string is used for beating up the weft. This kind of loom is common among them because of certain advantages it offers such as the compact texture of clothes woven in a tension loom the ease with which the loom can be erected in any place or rolled un when it is not in use and the simplicity of the loom which enables its parts to be replaced easily and practically without any cost.

## *Religion, Language and Literature*

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### **Well Defined Gods and Goddesses (Tingwang)**

Although the Zemis believe in spritual beings they cannot be rightly called animistic. They have well defined gods and goddesses who, they believe, take special interest in the life of the people. They believe, that there is a God known to them as 'Tingwang' who guides and controls the life of man and who is above all of the gods (hera) and spirits (herui). This supreme God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. He is to be worshipped and prayed and he is to be feared and respected. He is the supreme and dispenser of good and evil and it is he who makes man rich or poor, great and small. Besides this Almighty there is a good number of gods whom they fear and revere. There are legends that eight of these gods are the children of a goddess called 'hezale' and two of them, 'chuprai' and 'munsenieu' are the most important and due propitiations is to be given to them in times of sickness. The functions of the other goddesses are not known but they

good health. The flesh of the bird killed should be eaten only by the ailing person while the blood is offered to the goddess.

### **Nvuikereura**

Every year in its beginning there is a sacrifice called 'nvuikereura' or 'sacrificed of ten hens'. This sacrifice is performed for the purpose of propitiating the Almighty God (Tingwang). The priest invokes the help of Tingwang to keep the people in good and sound health throughout the year. It may, however, be noted that there are two classes of sacrifice to the deities, viz, sacrifices to the family deities called 'kelakra' and sacrifices to the community deities called 'keluara'. If the ancestors of the past are not given adequate sacrificial articles at their death, their spirits may visit their descendents and trouble them. The number of animals to be offered depends upon the ability of the family or clan which performs the sacrifice. Sacrifice, to the community deities is done when the general condition of the community is not good, that is, due to epidemic diseases like cholera, small pox etc. On this occasion one or two white or black fowl are let loose and they are not to be caught by any body as these fowl are meant for the gods only. On this occasion no outsider or stranger is allowed to enter into the village and to prevent strangers from entering the village two boughs of tree are put on each side of village gate.

### **Dreams & Vision and Dogmas**

A word may be added regarding the interpretation of their dreams and vision. It is believed that when a person has a bad dream at night like falling from a tree or into the river or stream or encountering fearful experience that person must not leave his house on the following day. He is believed to have been caught by the evil spirits which are to be a fowl. In this case the priest is consulted who after killing the fowl on some plaintain leaves, offers it to the spirits to free the person from their grip. When a person who goes on a journey sees a black cat crossing the path he is to turn back home otherwise he will

streams, and rocks, are believed to be the creations of Tingwang; but solar eclipse (naimik nra) and lunar eclipse (hekeu'nra) are the cause of the devil (nra) who swallows them up at certain seasons of the year resulting in failure of their crops and famine following in its train. The thunder (hegikeube) is due to the quarrel between husband and wife living in heaven who turn all things upside down thus making the roar or noise in heaven. When sacrifices cannot be strictly followed as instructed by the 'tingkupeu', hail stones (gesak) will fall down from heaven to undo the works of man especially that of his fields. Earthquake (kaketaibe) is caused by some spirits who shake the earth which is usually followed by a poor, harvest.

### **Life of Zemi**

Life for Zemi is full of fears and horrors. The illness of a person is attributed to some wild spirits. In such a case, therefore, the 'tingkupeu' the person who, they believe, has got spiritual insight and power is consulted. He is supposed to know the cause of the illness by the expedient of drawing lots and accordingly pronounces the cause which may be either due to the gods, goddesses or spirits inhabiting a particular precipice or rock etc. The 'tingkupeu' also declares the number of fowl or pigs to be sacrificed and offering to the gods is done according to his instruction.

When a person is suddenly attacked with unconsciousness and encounters fearful experiences or he meets with an unexpected death on the way or in the jungle, the cause of such misfortunes is attributed to the agency of wild spirits.

### **Herasiateuhe**

In such cases an offering known as 'herasiateuhe' is performed and a dog, a pig or a fowl is sacrificed but their meat should not however, be eaten. Also when a person's health deteriorates, it is taken to be caused by the goddess 'chuprai' or 'mun-senieu' as the priest attributes it and a fowl is to be sacrificed to the goddess in order that she may leave the ailing person in



10-15 minutes. After the prayer was over the compounder of the hospital came at this house and saw the patient and asked them to take him to the hospital. They made a stretcher and he was taken to the hospital after about 3 hours. Later his friend learned from the doctor of the hospital that since he was an oldman he got a shock, and the injury was not serious. Thus this case fairly indicates that such believes and practices of the non-Christian Zemes still persists among the Christian Zeme to a certain extent.

### **Zemi Language**

The Zemi Nagas of North Cachar Hills speak their own language which is known as the 'Zemi' language. The Liangmes, who are the other sub-division of the Kaccha Nagas, speak the same language but with a little variation in accent or intonation and the Rongmes or Kabuis speaks a different one though there are quite a good number of words akin to the Zemis and the Liangmes. Sir George Grierson (*Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. III, Part II), classed the Kaccha Naga language in the Naga Bodo group. In the 1961 (Part II-C) census there were 185 male and 189 female Zeme speakers in the Assam Hills division. The same holds true for the united Mikir and North Cachar district. They have no script of their own instead use the Roman script with few alterations in the alphabets. For example, A.I. (to be pronounced in high tone), 'm (pronounce, 'im') 'n (pronounce 'in', 'ng (pronounce 'ing'), 'ng (pronounced 'eng') are added to the alphabets while C.F.Q.V.X.Y. are omitted. The Zemis, except the Christian Zemis have no literature of their own. There are songs, folk stories, legends, etc. which are never reduced to writing but are orally handed down from father to son through generations Past.

### **Zeliangruoing Committee**

The Zemi christians have some written books, there is a Zeliangruoing literature committee which aims to bring about

meet with some misfortunes on the way. when he sees a snake crossing the road he must either kill it or return home. When a dog howls at midnight it is considered as an ill omen and some one living in the village may die. The howling of the dog is taken to be a sign of the presence of evil spirits which pass through the village.

### **Christian Zemis**

The Christian Zemis belong to the presbyterian Church and follow the set pattern of the presbyterian church organization.

The believes and practice discussed earlier is mainly applicable to the non-christian Zemes. But these believes and practices still persist to a certain extent among the Christian Zemes, as illustrated by a case study.

Mr. John Jema, who is Assistant Secretary, Executive Committee, N. C. Hills District Council, Haflong was staying at Bara Haflong. He told to his friend that one day his father was knocked off by a speeding jeep on the road. His father received injuries on the head and on the waist. Since the driver of the jeep knew him so he brought his father at home. At home his father remained unconscious for one night. Mr. John Jeme, though being a graduate of Gauhati University, and with a responsible post, did not think of taking his father to the hospital. His father was laying on a cot in a smoky room by the side of the fire made for keeping the room temperature high. The room was not well ventilated. The relatives and friends were sitting surrounding his father. He was given only some tea when he gained his conscious. The morning following the accident when he reached Mr. John Jemes house, he learned that they are waiting for a man who wants to pray to the God for the recovery of the patient. After some time the man came to his house. While he was praying all the persons sitting in that room lowered their head in regard to the prayer. That man (not the priest, but an elderly man) uttered few sentences in Zeme language, in a rhythmic tone for about

## *Family Clan, Kinship, Inter-Community Relationship and Social Structure*

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### **Hekiria**

Generally in the Zemi villages the type of the family is simple consists of husband, wife and the unmarried children. The term 'family' among Zemi means 'Hekiria, meaning 'Rows of houses' in broader sense thereby implying 'lineage' traced from the clan. In the narrower sense it may simply mean 'Kelak', i.e. House derived from the word 'Kelaktenbe' which means 'marriage'. When a man marries and sets up a house of his own, his house is called 'Kelak' or more correctly, 'Pakelak' meaning 'his home or his family'. Being patriarchal society the Zemi's trace their descendant through their fathers or forefathers. It is the social ideal that parents live to-together with their married children and only when the married brothers fail to live together due to various reasons then they live separately and establish a new house of their own after a year or more of their marriage.

uniformity in text books, script, etc. This has evolved common script so as to facilitate production of common standardised text books, for schools, hymn books, bible extracts etc. The District Council has not yet taken any steps to encourage their language. Though the District Council has provisions for the introduction of Zemi language in the primary stage and also for the preparation of text books in the Roman alphabet. The council has taken over all the Government Primary Schools but the medium of instruction still used is either English or Bengali. The Zemi language has been introduced only in those Primary schools which are run by the Presbyterian Mission to which the Zeme Christians belong. The Zeme Primary text books which are prepared and published by the Mission are also in use.

### **Primary Schools**

The villages which are nearer the town or have some access to the urban centres are having the primary schools while the interior villages which are remote from the town are lacking even the primary schools. As a matter of fact, the idea of education is most readily appreciated by the Christian Zemis. In some villages the education is as old as the coming of Christianity.

### **Literate Person**

According to 1961 Census the number of literate persons in the North Cachar Hills are 437 out of the total population of 8,338. This shows that the literate persons are very few among the Zemi Nagas and constitute only 5.2% of the total population. Most of them have not yet realized the value of education or are rather not yet willing to part with their children for education.

nickname (Nkuanepu) to which the audience took exception. It is said that from that time onwards his descendants came to be known as 'Nkuames', i.e., the members belonging to that clan. At present the members of these two clans, i.e. Mpame and Nkuame though originally regarded as one clan can intermarry but with a show of restraint or reservation Zemis believe that as the twice passes the relationship between them two clans become more and distant, and so they can inter-marry.

### **Low Exogamy**

The clan is, however, socially of importance as the marriage unit and the law of exogamy obliges marriage outside the clan. It may be stated that there is no association of any clan with any occupation, as such the Zemi community is predominantly an agricultural community.

### **Patriarchal**

Being patriarchal, the father is the head of the family and on his death the eldest son assumes charge of his responsibility thereby inheriting the larger part of the property. This was in vogue in earlier times. Only males can inherit the property. If a man leaves no male issue at his death, the property will be equally divided among the deceased's male cousins. The usual custom is for his father to divide the bulk of his property among his sons during his life time. When the sons marry, each son receives his portion of the acquired property from his father and on the death of the father, the eldest son, though he may already have been given his share, inherits rest of his father's property including the house which was in the father's possession at the time of his death. The property of any son who dies without leaving any male child during the father's life time reverts to the latter but after the father's death it goes to the youngest son, while in the case after the youngest son himself dies without a male issue, his elder brothers share his property equally. If there is no father, a brother or son living, paternal uncle or, in the absence of such, any nearest male relative on the father's side would inherit the property. The personal of

### **Head of The Family**

The father, being the head of the family, commands respect from all the members which the latter consider as a part of their duty. In the absence of the father the eldest son or in his absence the elder or younger one takes charge of the family and that too if the members agree and if he can win their affection and respect. Otherwise, a disaccord may lead to the split up of the family. But no such case was however found during the field study. The mother also commands much respect in the family and keeps good care for the children when they are young and look after the needs and the requirements of the children.

In short, the family which is patriarchal in type is a well-knit unit and being patrilineal the members are descended from the oldest male resident in the house, within the family men and women enjoy equal status, except in the property inheritance which goes to the eldest son.

Beside doing household duties, woman render additional labour to man in their work in the fields.

### **Clans and Marriage**

The Zemis have the following clans namely Mpame, Nkuame Henumé, Nriame and Sogame, Ndaime and Hezanne. Of them Mpame and 'Nkuame' are considered as belonging to the same clan. Marriage within the clan is not the rule and all the clans mentioned above are equal in status. The clans are believed to be descended from a common ancestor by whose name the clan is known. As stated earlier, Mpame and Nkuame belonged to the same clan. They did not intermarry and were socially regarded as belonging to the same family. According to the Zemís, it is said that there was a man belonging to this (i.e. Mpa-Nkua clan) group and was nicknamed as 'Nkuampeu' one who rolls' and while competing in sports during festivals he uttered, as was his practice, a list of names of his grand fathers including his. Instead of uttering his own name he used his

p. 109) and this antagonism or rivalry coloured the Zemi life. The jealousy and suspicion of one clan for another had been a source of weakness. If there were disputes between two persons of different clans, then the clansmen on each side appear as partisans and foment the discord. However, only in cases of a breach of social code and religious observances the clans would unite.

### **Clan Enmity**

At present there are no traditional clan enmity. The clans are strictly exogamous and on no account can a clan marry within the clan. The clan is also recognized as a unit for genna purposes (T.C. Hodson, 1911, p. 73) and what is genna to a clan, say for the death of one of their members, may not be genna for other clans. Except for the gennas for the religious and ceremonial purposes for the tribe as a whole. All these still hold true among the present day Zeme society. Each village possesses a wall defined area of territory not only of cultivated land but of waste and forest land as well. The village is a unit of socially organized community, acting as a whole and participating in the ritual associated with and intended to assist the cultivation of the community. Members of the same clan are found in different villages situated at long distances from one another. Since the villages are situated at long distances from one another and are not easily accessible so as the time passes, the kinship among the persons belonging to the same clan becomes remote, but sometime such relationships among persons belonging to the same clan of different villages are traceable as told by the Zemes themselves.

### **Women from other clans**

In the exogamous community the male element is the permanent element of the society and the women are only brought in from some other clan while the unmarried girls are destined to leave their clan of origin on marriage. This is one factor which keeps the various elements of the community rigidly apart.

the mother including the cash and the ornaments etc, goes to her daughters. Failing daughter, her property goes to her father's heirs who take all the property including ornaments, even if she has a son. But presently it is found that though in the Zemi society only male members have the right to inherit yet it is not correct to say that the eldest son gets the largest share. When the grown up sons get married and established their own new homes, they leave their parents and live independently. It is customary on the part of the parent to ask the youngest son (even after his marriage) to remain with him. The idea is, that the parents now being old, should be looked after and attended by one of his sons. In such cases the normal procedure is to leave the entire property at the hand of the youngest son at the time of his (parents) death and some amount of property also goes to other sons as willed by the dying father. The quantity of property to be shared among the sons may be less for one and more for others as warranted by their circumstances in which they are placed.

### **Property**

If a man has only daughters and therefore leaves no male inheritor the property will go to the nearest and eldest relative of his family who in turn will be charged with the responsibility of looking after his (dead man's) widow and daughters, whether married or unmarried. And in case, the man dies living no issue, his property will go to his nearest and eldest relative who will take charge of the property as well as the widow thus left behind. The widow to be cared for and maintained must remain under the roof of that family but if she prefers to leave the family and go to her own family, the responsibility of her husband's relative ceases. But such action of the widow leaving the family of her husband is rare and is socially and morally denounced.

### **Relation among the Different Segments of the Community**

The real unit of the society are the clans. In the past relation between the clans were not always in amity (J.H. Hutton 1921,



## STRUCTURE OF SOCIAL CONTROL PRESTIGE AND LEADERSHIP

### District Council

In spite of the present day political administration the ancient system of social organization of the Zemis is still in vogue. The District Council recognizes the functions and duties of their organizations as well as the members of office bearers. Each village has its own headman known as 'Kadeipeo' whose office is hereditary and who is assisted by a council known as 'Samkakibe' which is always held in the bachelors house or morung (hangseoki). The 'kadeipeo' convenes the village council (samkakibe) he and with the help of the village priest (Tingkupeu) he chooses elders to sit in the council. As a matter of fact all adult male persons above 30 years old are members of the 'Samkakibe'. Among the members of the council there is, besides, the headman, an assistant headman who performs the duties of the headman in his absence. Then there is the 'tingkupeu' who is responsible for the public sacrifices and who conducts the religious life of the village. He is also empowered to fix the date of the gennas on which people abstain from work as well as the dates of festivals. Over and above there is a village crier (*sabepen*) whose duty is to proclaim to the villagers the decision of the village council on matters that effect the common weal as directed by the 'kadeipeo'. The council decides nearly all matters relating to the village and has jurisprudence over minor disputes, while complicated disputes normally go to the District Council Court at Haslong. Disputes concerning land, theft, inheritance of property, adultery, divorce etc. are disposed of by the 'Samkakibe' in accordance with their own tribal law and a dispute which can not be settled by the council is referred to the higher court of the district council.

### Morung

The most notable feature of the social structure of the Zemis is the institution of the morung or the bachelor's houses. Their

## INTER-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

### Homogeneity

The Zemi Nagas are distinguished from other Nagas tribes by its remarkable homogeneity and specially localized in the Borail hills (L.A. Waddel, 1900) and so are in contact with the Kukis, the Dimasa Kacharies and the Homars rather than with the Naga tribes. With the Dimasa Kacharis they have been in contact long after they came into this part of the Borail hills, the contact was rather peaceful. But they have not always been on good terms with the Kukis, boundary disputes and trespasses are the problems which can in no way be solved. The cause of the enmity has been inherent in the two communities, since British days (U. Grahm Bayer, 1946, pp. 50-57). Both the two rival communities practised shifting cultivation and when the Zemis first came to these hills they claimed a large tract of land for cultivation. Since they follow cycle migration and come back after about 10 years to the former site only when it has fully recovered. The properties are buried on the old site to mark the place for reoccupation. In course of time the Kuki immigrants appeared and were in search of new lands to replace the one which was exhausted. The British Government in order to check onward a certain tract of land which certainly had been old Zeme sites and presumed to have been abandoned. Thus the Zemis were ultimately left with only that part of their land which was in cultivation when the boundaries were demarcated. As a matter of fact much of the good land was lost to the Kukis, which the Zemis could not forget easily. Excepting the Kukis, whom they look on with distrust and suspicion, their relation with other communities as Dimasa Kacharis and Homar has been peaceful. The fact of the dispute between the Zemis and the Kukis has been accepted by the Zemis, but the enquiries regarding the dispute is yet to be made from the other end before the conclusions are made.

some of the boys exempt themselves from work in the fields and do nothing except to drink zau, gossip or do a little basketry work, play music, bathe and groom their youthful body for the favours of young girls. Iandeed, it is a grand life, to which a married man looks back wishfully and with regret, for the day a boy marries he causes to be a member of the hangseoki and therefore he ceases to sleep in it. It should be noted that the kienga have their own leader known as 'kezeipeu' whom they themselves elect from amongst the village elders and who teaches the youths by precept and example. They are taught to make themselves perfect in hunting, fishing, fighting, and other namely arts. It is in the morung that the village young men are given training for their future. It is here that they learn to make baskets of different designs, learn musical instruments, rehearse folktales, learn the art of using spears, shields etc. The most important thing they learn here is the spirit of co-operation and unity and the realization that one must place the community's interests above one's self in order to succeed in life.

### **Resident Leader**

Every morung has a resident leader or guide who lives in the morung itself, usually at the back side of the building especially allotted for him. He is appointed by the village elders. He should be an elderly person with specific views on matters common to the villagers and also be a man adept in the art of compromise and reconciliation. He should be expert in basketry, cane works, music, folk tales etc. and lastly be very sociable for obvious reasons. He is appointed for indefinite periods. If he wants to quit the office he may inform the elders of the village who will in turn select some one of his type for the purpose. Lower in rank than the leader, there are two young men or youth leaders called *herangmepu* selected from among the members of the morung by all the other members. Their function is to enforce the orders or direction of the morung's leader. They are to see to the daily needs of the morung in matters like provision of firewood, water etc. and also to enforce discipline in the morung life. They may hold office indefinitely.

morungs have always become their pride and joy and the very life-veins of their social and cultural activities. In every village there must invariably be a morung and if a big village, two morungs for the comfort and convenience of village lands. In the Laisong villages there are two such morungs. The boys dormitory is known as 'hangseoki', while the one used by the girls is called 'leoseoki'. However, members of both the dormitories are collectively known as 'Kienga'. The girls have no such 'leoseoki' of their own but usually use the house of each member by turn.

### **Compulsory Membership**

Every male member in the village should be a member of either of the two morungs, if there are two morungs in the village. The morung has members of all the clans and is not confined to one clan only. From the same house or family there can be members belonging to different morungs. It is not necessary to divide the number of houses for the purpose of membership but usually there is an, approximate, if not equal balance in the strength of the membership in the two morungs.

### **Admission to morung**

The method of admission to the Morung is a simple one. If a male child is born in a family, any member of either of the Morungs informs the father of the child that he should become a member of his (informer's) morung and that settles the question of the child's membership. As soon as a boy or a girl reaches the age of eight or nine he/she ceases to sleep in the respective dormitory. Girls work at home during the day and use the dormitory only at night. In the dormitory they learn spinning, weaving, music and songs. No married man, not even the parents in whose the club is held far the night, ever enters it and only the village headman may drop in for a fatherly visit. If there is any other visit at all it is from a young man who comes stealthily at night to see his own sweetheart. Unlike the girls the boys spend the whole of their time in the hangseoki and go home only for meals or when they are ill. Sometimes,

## *Life Cycle and Beliefs*

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### Sons most Welcome

A married couple always looks to the day when they will have children. To them sons are most welcome but daughters too are equally treated.

### Heteu

There is no professional midwife or dhai among the community. Child delivery is taken by some old woman in the family and, in the absence of each a woman, any other old women from the neighbourhood is summoned to help in delivering the baby. The women are not paid for their work but she is only entertained with food by the members of the family. An expectant mother about to deliver a child usually breaks the necklaces of beads (*heteu*) that she is wearing on her neck and at the same time takes off all her clothes except the one which she wraps over the body like a shawl. She is kept separated from the rest of the household, her bed being separated and a

### Hangseoki

The 'hangseoki' as a corporate body organizes dances, repairs the village pipe line, make new water troughs, cleans the village paths, and constructs and repairs the existing paths. They may also be hired by a rich man to bring the harvest home or construct a new house and the payment either in cash or kind received, usually goes to the *hangseoki's* fund for feast during festivals. The payment depends on the volume of work which usually ranges between Rs. 20 to Rs. 30 in cash and ten to twenty baskets of paddy in kind. This corporate body also helps each members in turn to work in the fields which is ready for weeding or harvest.

### No Class Distinction

Though there is no class distinction in the society yet women do not enjoy the same status as that of a man. Women have no part to play in public activities and it is only young girls who make only brief and formal appearance and that also with their club members (*kienga*). They never appear in a village *darbar* in person but are represented by a male relative. They cannot enter the meeting and it is immodest to see them in the boy's dormitory. Women have no legal rights at all and men are paramount in society. No man will eat a game killed by a woman for it is unclean and unnatural. Hunting is a man's job and no women participate in it. All works which require physical strength are men's responsibility while works like cooking, drawing water, cleaning the house etc. are always women's jobs.

Even at present in the non-Christian Zemi villages the *hangseoki* plays the same important part as it was in the ancient days particularly in those villages which are far away from the urban centres. Among the Christian Zemis, particularly those living in the Haflong area have clubs for the male and the female members, where boys and girls in their respective clubs learn songs, dances, and games etc.; and other activities from the elders. It is more in the nature of clubs in the urban area. In the interior Christian village, the *morung* system prevails particularly among the newly converts, who have recently accepted the new faith.

- (c) The baby cannot be taken outside through the front side of the house *i.e.* the side facing the village street before 5 days are elapsed.
- (d) The water used for washing and bathing the baby should not be scattered here and there but be collected in a pit specially made for the purpose at the back side of the house and the mouth of the pit be kept closed to prevent the domestic animals like dogs, pigs, etc. from licking the water. This is done because of the belief that any one who does not carefully observe then rules of hygiene is more prone to bodily injuries like cuts etc, while in the field or during sports like hunting, animal chase etc.
- (e) Formerly no outsider was allowed to enter the house before the elapse of 5 days after the child birth but now there is no such ban, this may be due to the urban influence, and is more found among the christian Zemis.
- (f) After 5 days the child is taken outside and its hair shaved by one of the elders of the village. A fowl is sacrificed during the operation. Formerly the sacrificial meat could not be taken by anyone except the mother of the child and a very old man or woman of the village. Now there is no such restriction. After the ceremony the husband can go out freely performing his normal duty.

At the end of the 5 days the mother is allowed to go out but only through the back door of the house since no one should see her going out. While doing so she carries out all the cooking utensils, which have been used by her during the genna, and when no one sees her, she throws them away behind the house, she is performing this act, her husband keeps watch so that no body can look at his wife, even himself, while she does so. It is believed that by doing so the wife and her child will be free from the grasp of evil spirits, but if any one sees

separate hearth (*hemibam*) built for her though in the same room where the general hearth is situated. Zemis in the interior villages believes that if the father happens to be away from home, the child waits for its father and will not be born till he arrives. Regarding birth much of the old customs have been disregarded by the Christian Zemis. Among the Christian Zemis the expectant mother about to deliver a child need not break the necklaces of seeds nor does she need to strip off her clothes. She is also not separated from the rest of the household as in the case of the non-christian zamis. The old methods of delivery, are still followed by them.

### **Genna**

Among the Christian and the non-christian Zemis, immediately after delivery the women is given rice beer, rice and some chicken curry after the child and the mother are bathed and the naval cord is cut. The diet thus prepared is meant to compensate the stress and strain she bears during child birth. For five days or more the mother is fed exclusively on this diet and during this period, the husband as well as the members of the household observe genna among the non-christian zemis. That is they will not go to their works in the fields, nor carry firewood from the jungle but they may go to work in other's fields. They must also live on the food which is available within the precinct of the house but not on the food which is brought from outside. If a male child is born then a cock is killed and if a female then a hen. There are some taboos connected with child birth in the family which are as follows.

### **Taboos connected with child birth**

- (a) The meat prepared for the mother should not be shared by the husband. Only the female members can share. Even small boys are not allowed as it is believed that, when they grow up they will not succeed in sports like animal hunt, bird trapping etc.
- (b) The husband should not go out to the jungles, jhums etc. before the elapse of 5 days.



## **Baptise**

Among the Christian Zemis the child is Baptised after one or two months or more and no sacrifice is observed in this respect. The Baptising ceremony which is done according to Christianity and consists of celebrating with rice beer and rice among the relatives and friends. Rice beer is not encouraged by the Christians but it cannot be given up by the converts who usually use it like the as by others. The mother always carries her child on the back and continues to do so as she works.

## **Ear Boring**

The ears of both boys and girls are pierced when they are about one year old. A sharp pointed iron is used for piercing the ear lobe. Ear rings of metal are put on and some times when the parents have no means yet to procure ear-rings small pieces of bamboo splits are inserted inside the lobe so that it may not disappear. No ear piercing ceremony is held by the community.

## **Pregnancy**

Illicit pregnancy in the society is of rare occurrence but if there be a base, the elders of the village try to explore avenues to see if the boy, provided he is traced out and the girl can be united in matrimony according to custom. If they cannot be united then the decision of the elders of the village going against the boy will be final. Sometimes fines are imposed. The girl is not turned out of her house. Sometimes the family of the boy invites the girl to their house to come and give birth to the child in their house. This invitation from the end of the boy's family is considered to be a good social behaviour and it results in either compromise or marriage. But if the boy denies his association with the girl despite the fact that it is through him that conception takes place, then the girl after giving birth would go to the boy's family and hand over the child. The family of the boy will then take the whole responsibility of

her doing so, misfortunes would befall on her, which may result in her death and of the child. After the performance of all these, the mother resumes her normal life and eats and drinks from the same hearth and the same utensils which the family use.

### **Twin Child**

Twins which are of rare occurrence are well received by the members of the family. In case of the twins of the same sex the parents are congratulated and blessed. It is customary for the mother to cloth them in an identical manner, that is, the same variety and of the same pattern of design. But in cases where the twins are of opposite sexes wearing identical clothes is considered unlucky and it is believed that it may lead to the death of both the twins.

### **Tingwang**

The birth of a child is dedicated to the Almighty God who is known Ting wang. When a male child is born, a cock is killed and offered to Ting wang whereas in the case of a female child a hen is offered. The offering is made by the eldest male member of the family. The naming of the child takes place usually after the ninth day of its birth.

### **Həzintak**

After naming ceremony (*hezintak*) all relatives and friends are invited to a feast in which pork and *zau* are served. The name is given according to the wishes of the child's grandfather or relatives. Among the non-Christian Zemis the name given to a child is mostly considered from the point of view of the ancestral lines of the child's forefathers who were victorious in war or amassed wealth. The child is never given a name of a living relative as it is believed that the latter will die soon since a substitute bearing the same has been provided for this earth. So the names of dead ancestors are very popular in the community.

value of their relationship and the lower the price will mean a psychological conquest of friendship for both parties.

To-day, the degree of marriage relationships, up to which marriage is prohibited among the zones is determined by the following social and other conditions.

### **No Sexual Inter-Course In The Same Clan**

(a) Sexual intercourse between persons of the same clan is regarded as incest, whether the intercourse takes place before or after marriage. Such relations between persons of the same clan is against their social customs. One should not marry one's sister's daughter, aunt's daughter, Uncle's daughter, and so no. It is also restricted to contract marriage with one's sister-in-laws sister. The two brother's of a clan can marry two sisters of the same family belonging to another clan, but is believed that their married life will be marred by the premature death of one of them, husband or wife.

(b) At present there is no traditional clan enemy but in the past marriages were not contracted between two families if they were entertaining grudge, or having revengeful or inimical attitudes towards each other, left as legacy by the forefathers.

(c) It is prohibited to marry a member of a clan previously over taken by a unknown disease or who died by accident e.g. falling from a tree, or killed by a tiger, etc.

### **Consanguineous Marriage**

The Zemis recognize the evils of consanguineous marriage which, according to them may result in the child being born a mere or less physically deformed.

### **Marriage Age**

The usual age of marriage is between twenty and twenty-five among the boys and fifteen to twenty among the girls. However,

rearing the child at all costs. This practice is considered to be anything but honourable. Sometimes misearriage or death of the girl takes place and this may amount to a very serious matter unless the elders of the village intervene. Sometimes the real culprit responsible for the pregnancy cannot be traced out by the girl because of her making associations with many youngmen. This is the case in which youngmen involve themselves with a girl of bad character, which is very rare.

The last of the persons making approach to her will then be responsible for the unwanted child. Possession of such a child usually tells upon the future career of that man. In the village no case of illicit pregnancy was found.

### Marriage

In the past marriage relationships outside the members of the tribe was a taboo. But now this traditional ban has been relaxed perhaps owing to frequent contacts with the members of other tribes. Among the Zemis a man may also marry his father's sister's daughter though such kinds of marriages are regarded as unfertile. However, marriage with mother's brothers, or *father's sister's son is preferable as such kinds of marriages are conducive to the strengthening of family ties between the two parties concerned.* In the Zemi society one marry a girl whose clan is the same as that of one's mother or father. Again it is not considered to be socially expedient to marry a very close neighbour. The idea being that the family with whom they have had cordial relationships need not be explored for any help in times of danger or need he or they will come to help uncalled for. There seems to be another reason for this custom also. At the time of haggling over the bride's price the family of the bridegroom finds it hard to fix the price and to impose certain conditions and terms on the party. If the bride happens to be of different clan then the settlement of the price can be affected frankly and easily, it may be very high or very low. The higher the price, the dearer the

the bridegroom's house. The bride's price in terms of money usually ranges from Rs. 200, to Rs. 400 and that in kind includes necklaces, cattle, mithuns etc. Sometimes even land is given as bride's price, but such practices are not found when a girl belongs to a different village. It sometimes happens that the bridegroom's party cannot pay the whole amount of the bride's price at a time. In such cases the party pays or hands over to the bride's parents whatever amount it can afford and the balance may be paid or given after sometime, generally after the harvest. When both the parties are satisfied, then a pig is brought by the bridegroom's party and it is killed and its meat is taken by them. The bridegroom's party then fixes the date when the marriage is to be solemnised. The marriage is, however, performed on the day fixed irrespective of the bride's price has been fully paid or not.

### **Mpaumei**

On the appointed day a feast is given in the house of the bride on which relatives and friends are invited. The bridegroom comes to the house of the bride with his relatives and they all partake of the food and drink provided by the bride's party. This feast is known as 'mpaumei'. A day or two after the feast the bridegroom and his party accompanied by the bride and her party leaves for the former's house. Before doing so, the bride's father kills some fowl or pigs, the meat of which is to be taken to the house of the groom. An old woman (gechipai) acting as escort to the bridegroom accompanies the party to the house of the groom. On reaching his house and before the bride sets her foot in the house, the 'gechipai' makes the bride to step on a piece of iron placed just at the entrance of the house near the door. While doing so the 'gechipai' utters, "May the bond of your marriage be as strong as this piece of iron and may you both be happy and prosperous always". "On this day a feast known as 'Kahegiapeu' is given in the house of the bridegroom.

the boys are often found to marry at the age of twenty-five and above and the girls at the minimum age of marriage.

### **Marriage by Consent**

Marriage by consent and at the same time love marriage are the usual practice. The boy himself chooses the bride and after making his final decision he informs his parents.

### **Initiative from the Boy's Parents**

The boys parents send word to the girl's parents with a view to ascertain whether they will accept the proposal of marriage. After girls parents agree to the proposal an answer to that effect is sent to the boy's parents. As a rule, both the parties concerned take ancestry as a guide in making the decision. Usually before giving their consent the boys parents first try to ascertain whether the ancestor of the bride has been victims of unknown diseases, and whether they had met with accidents of a serious nature etc. Similarly the parents of the girl will also trace the family history of the boy in the like manner as is done by the boy's parents.

### **Gachipai**

After everything has been decided, the girl's parents pronounce their acceptance of the boy's marriage proposal. The boy then set off for the house of the prospective bride on the fixed day, accompanied by his party which includes one old man (gachipai) who is also one of his relatives. The party takes with them a small quantity of rice and two or three gourd of *zau*. The food and the drink are shared by the members of the party together with the bride's parents at the latter's house. On this occasion the dowry is also fixed for the bride.

### **Question of Payment**

After settling the question of payment, the bride's price which may be either in cash or in kind is brought over from

second marriage contract. When she remarries all the usual ceremonies and practices are performed. A widow can marry her late husband's younger but not the husband's elder brother.

## Death

The death of a person is announced by a village crier and friends and relatives flock to the house of the bereaved family. The body is washed in warm water with 'heneu', the bark of a certain tree which makes the water frothy when it is mixed thoroughly with water. The body is washed by warm water by members of the family of either sex depending on the sex of the dead person. It is then placed on a bed and covered from head to foot with the deceased's clothes. If the dead person is a male, the deceased's ceremonial garments are placed over the body. The family of the dead person kills fowl or pigs or both and prepares a feast. The feast is attended by the friends and relatives and those who engage themselves in making coffin and digging the grave. The dead is considered as one who goes on a long journey to the spiritual world. Hence provision of food is made for his use on the way. When preparation for the feast is ready, the watchman who is selected from those present, offers food and meat, especially the liver of animal killed on that occasion, to the dead. Rice and meat offered to the dead together with a gourd of *zau* is put in a basket and the watchman will bid the dead to take it to his spiritual land and do according to his wish. The relatives bring rice, meat and '*zau*' and all their food and drink are presented to the deceased's family who on that day can eat and drink only that which is brought by the relatives. A portion of his food and drink is placed over the deceased's head as a share. The dead body is generally kept in the house for two days and sometimes even more depending on the liking of the deceased's family. All this time the deceased's family remain in mourning. Meanwhile, some members engage themselves (*Kienga*) in making coffin and dig the grave (*herau*) either in the courtyard in front of the house or along the side of any one of the village paths. The coffin is made of wood and has

## **Mpuimu**

The bride usually makes a short stay at the house of her husband. During this period she is not allowed to use any of the articles she brought with her to her husband's house. Whatever she needs is provided from the husband's side. After some days the bride's father gives another feast known as 'mpuimu' in which the newly wedded couples are invited. On this occasion the wife receives the blessings of her parents, after which she and her husband go back to the latter's place and settle down. This completes the marriage rites and the wife can hence forth use any of her belongings which she has brought with her on the previous occasion.

## **Divorce**

Though divorce is permissible it is rare to the community. When a man wants to divorce his wife within three years of their marriage all the property except the animals are divided equally between husband and wife. The wife must also return the bride's price to her divorced husband, children born of their marriage invariably belong to the husband. If a wife leaves her husband only a short time after marriage, say about a year or so, all the property including the animals like mithun, cattle, fowl etc., together with the bride's price go to the husband or his parents. Where the wife seeks for divorce after two or three years of marriage the bride's price is not returned but only the personal belongings of the husband.

## **Adultery**

If the divorce comes as a result of adultery committed by the wife, she or her parents must give one mithun if possible or else, at least a pig to the injured party, that is, the husband's relatives or part from the bride's price and either belongings of the husband. If a widow wishes to remarry after the death of her husband she is allowed to do so provided she receives permission from the late husband's relatives and provided also that she is still residing in her in-laws house at the time of her



of structure erected for this purpose. At right angle to this fence and on the opposite side of the grave a bamboo rail is constructed over which clothes, ornaments etc. of the deceased are placed and if it were a man, a spear is also stuck into the ground. In the case of a woman, a little basket containing weaving implements, and also her ornaments like beads, earrings etc. are placed on the grave. A flat stone structure (herau chu) is also raised over her grave.

### **Death Ceremonies of Christian Zemis**

Among the Christian Zemis although the death ceremonies are performed according to the Christian rites there are some of the old practice which are also followed. Thus when a person dies, the corpse is washed, clothed, digging of the grave and the preparation of the coffin is done in the same way as the non Christians. A kind of feast is also offered to those present and those who helped in digging the grave and preparing the coffins. Before the burial would take a ceremony consisting of bible reading, songs and prayer is performed and the church elder or pastor would conduct such ceremony. The coffin is taken to the grave for burial and before the coffin would be lowered down to the grave a simple ceremony of Bible reading and prayer is again performed. Over the grave a wooden cross bearing the name of the deceased and the date of death or sometimes a memorial stone (herauchu) is raised. After the burial is over, the church also organizes another ceremony in the dead in which sermons, hymn songs and prayers are performed.

### **Spirit of the dead Man**

The spirit of the dead is believed to be lingering in the dead man's house until it is forced to go away and leave the house. This is the reason why they offer food and drink to the ghost (herui) at every meal. The offering takes place only after ceremonial separation of the deceased's spirit from the rest of the family is complete, therefore, on feast times (hengimai), usually held to commemorate the dead, big bowls containing 'Hencu' are

no lid to cover it. When the dead person is a man his father-in law or any of his elder male relatives stand on the left side of the body and spear is also placed on its left side. But if it is a woman a piece of black cloth is placed over the body. In both cases, however, a piece of hair is cut from the head of the deceased. When this preparation is complete the coffin is brought inside the house where the body covered with a piece of cloth is placed. The dead body is duly wrapped with a piece of cloth and put inside the coffin and the household articles which has been used by the dead during his or her life time such as clothes, ornaments, spears, dao, hoe etc. are first placed near the coffin and are later carried to the grave. Articles including grains, seeds, meat, chillies and other things like boxes, clothes etc. used by the house hold are put on the graves but are not left there. They are taken back, after the burial, for use by the female relatives of the deceased. Beside these there are some other ceremonial articles though of no material value but are considered absolutely necessary to be put on the grave. These are the jaws of a pig which they believe would chase off the evil one who waits to devour the dead. Further they also place a little quantity of salt which they say the dead person will take to the new world, a piece of cloth which they think will deceive the evil one, some thorns to prick and kill the worms and a kind of umbralla made of leaves of plant to shelter him or her from the rain and sun. After the coffin is laid down in the grave, earth is heaped in and the grave is levelled. A memorial stone called 'herauchu' is raised over it and is also fenced with wooden poles. In respect of the burial of important persons like the head man, the priest or bamboo is constructed over the grave of the dead. One wooden post with some notches on it also raised. Each notch stands for some noble deed done by the dead person during his life time.

When every thing is complete, fowl, pigs and sometimes mithuns are killed by the deceased's family and a feast is given to friends and relatives. The blood of the animals killed is offered to 'Tingwang, the supreme being, that he may guide the departed soul safely to the unknown. The skulls of the slaughtered animals are hung on top of the fence or some kind

## *Dwelling Dress and Food Habits*

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### **Dwellings**

Villages are generally built on the slopes of the hills and as such there cannot be much space to accomodate many houses. There is no clan wise clustering of houses. It should be noted that though the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District Council passed a resolution regarding the regrouping of villages so that existing small villages may be replaced by bigger villages with a large number of people living side by side, the resolution is still not applicable to the Zemi villages where the average number of households are very small comprising only about 50 households in each village. All these villages look more of a hamlet and Laisong is the biggest village among the Zemi villages consisting of 124 households (according to 1961 census) and even in this village, houses are added together on the slope of the hill. From very early times Zemis adopted a system of cycle migration, when the villages were temporarily abandoned in the courses of the cycle. Then at that time the boundaries or monuments were marked or memorized, and the jumping places where major sacrifices were performed and when heads

placed outside the house so that the ghosts may bathe themselves like the living and join in the celebrations. During such times all the things that the dead may require which have not been placed in the grave at the time of the burial, such as gourds, seed, clothes, various tools etc. are provided for the dead. When this is done the priest (*tingkupeu*) takes with him one fowl and proceeds to the top of the village where the fowl is sacrificed after that he comes down the main footpath and in a loud voice asks the ghosts to take away their personal possessions and leave the place.

When the ghosts have done through the gateway to the land of the dead the '*tingkupeu*' shuts the gate and returns to the village.

### **Un-Natural Death**

Persons killed by wild animals and those who die during childbirth as well as those who commit suicide, (though suicide is very rare among the community), are not allowed to be buried within the precinct of the village. Instead, they are buried at some distance away from the village. However, the rites and ceremonies are nearly the same as those in the normal deaths. The difference lies in the fact that in accidental or suicidal deaths the flesh of the animals like fowl or pigs killed are offered to the evil spirits who are believed to be the cause of such misfortunes. The beads worn by the dead person can be taken off only by an old male relative of the deceased who at the same time buries the dead body. The flesh of animals killed in connection with such deaths is given to all youngmen and women. When a person dies from a fall, this cause is also taken as accidental and the rites and ceremonies are performed in the same manner as in the latter.

chimney so the smoke has to find its own way out of the house. The result is that the walls look black and dismal.

### **Kemarumbe**

It is customary that a person who builds a new house receives every assistance he needs from his fellow villagers who are never paid for their labour but are entertained with rice beer and sometimes with food also. The owner of the house, on its completion, entertains those who helped to a feast known as 'Kemarumbe' literally meaning, 'trimming the front part of the roof'. This is so called because the grass on the front portion of the roof of the house is made to suspend or hang down low. The edge is then neatly cut or trimmed with sickles by young men of the village. With the assistance of neighbours, friends or relatives and the availability of the materials the construction of an average type of house does not require more than one or two days. On the day when work is completed the villagers are invited to a feast and the owner's friends and relatives join in the revelry and partake of pork and rice beer (zou or zu) which are served together with the rice.

### **Utenisils**

The household utensils include among other indigenous ones such things as enamel mugs, bowls and plates, aluminum cooking pot and occasionally brass dishes. These are the result of contact with the urban people. The principal indigenous household utensils are earthen pots for cooking (hegamli), wooden spoon (terui) wooden platters (ching kuak), cups or drinking vessels of bamboo (hepaipi ak) drinking vessels made of mithun's horn (buikepik), gourds for storing and carrying liquor (nrau), baskets, for storing and mixing liquor and vats, troughs and jars for fermenting liquor. Besides, there are inside the porch and the front rooms, the skulls of animals killed by the households in the chase or slaughtered by him on festive occasions. Brightly coloured insects and the plumage of birds are placed upon one of the cross beams to adorn the house. The houses are devoid of any piece of furniture or

taken in war here buried, was marked by an upright monolith. (Communication Man in India, 1948, Vol. 48, No. 102).

### **Bamboo Houses**

The houses are single stored and stand on bare ground roughly levelled to form the floor after building. The roof is thatched, the sides almost touching the ground. This kind of roofing prevents the houses from being blown off by strong winds. The houses are arranged in two rooms which lie on either side of the footpath facing each other. Each house has a small clearing in the front where their dead relatives are buried. Small uneven paths or sometimes steps connect the houses in the village. In most households where there is enough open spaces the little patches of maize or mustard are frequently found in the homestead ground. The house rest either on bamoo or wooden supports. The walls of the buildings are of split, bamboo frames. Generally the house has only two rooms. One which forms the front room Kungduaki is meant for outsiders or strangers. This is also used as a storeroom where paddy, placed inslde great baskets (Keluang) which are placed against the walls of the rooms. In this room pigs and fowl and the agricultural implements such as mortar (gepa), pestle (kemai), baskets (keluang), hoes (kepeu), daos (heka) etc. are kept. The second compartment is separated from the first by a plank wall on which there is an opening or door way. In this compartment there is the hearth (hemibam) which is made of three upright stones embedded in the earth forming a kind of a stand for the cooking pvt. Generally by the side of the hearth there are some two or three bedsteads (zeira) made of split bamboo and raised about two feet from the ground. There are no windows and the doors are the only ventilation of the home. The home has usually three doors one at the front which serves as the main entrance, another at the back of the house and the third at either side of the walls. The doors usually meesuring 5' 6" by 4' are made of either wood or plank. Each house has the space in front of it surrounded with a low wall of slab of stones marking off its compounds. As there are no

is worn round the upper portion of the body effectively covering the breasts. A kind of shawl called 'peingum' hangs down from the shoulders. It is to be noted that their traditional dress which they put on, especially the designs on their garments are not in any way related to status in the society at present. In earlier times the elaborate design on the garments were related to the status in the society attained through participation in war, success in love-making etc. The Zemis who are living in the towns wear shoes and chappals, this is also observed among the Zemi's livinge, particularly the men folk, than as compared to the females.

### **Male Ornaments**

Among the men it is observed that a silver ring is worn on each ear and sometimes rings of metal specially made for the purpose are suspended from the earlobes. Sometimes a feather or a flower (mapa) is also worn along with the ear-rings. Necklaces of beads (heteuba) are also worn around the neck. The non-Christian Zemis who can afford to wear 'Teleiteu' (made out of counc shell) generally do so.

### **Female Ornaments**

The women, are fond to wear ear-rings (kumchie) and necklace of beads (hetu), elephant thsk (teuba), piece of bone (telvil) or eorn of mithan (buisangke) round the neck. They put on brass bracelets (heta) on their hands. The Zemis do not practice tatooing, the hair is nicely cut and in such a way that it covers both the ears while on the front side of the head, the hair is cut short. The hair styles of the Zemis differ from one individual to another depending on one's own choice. There are three types of styles observed among men.

### **Hair Style**

1. *Telap-pei*: The hair is cropped very short only about half an inch in length so that it reveals the forehead as well as the ears and portion of the head at the back.

lavish decoration and thus are simple in both construction and design.

### **Modern Furniture**

The Zemis living in Haflong town and working in the government offices and who are better economically than the Zemi Nagas living in distant village from the town are found to be having furniture like tables, curtains etc. as found in the urban areas.

### **Hongseoke**

The 'hongseoke' or the morung of the Zemi village consists of a big house as shown in the photographs. The methods of construction and the materials are essentially the same as the other houses, the only difference being the largeness of the building. From the ceiling of the Hongseoke number of household materials like baskets, pots etc. suspended. In the centre of the morung is the hearth around which there are wooden planks on which the boys sit.

### **Dress and Ornaments**

The Zemi Nagas show not much interest in the modern types of dress with the exception of those living in town and in plains who generally put on European dresses. They still love to wear their traditional dress. Their clothes are richly coloured with beautiful and elaborate design woven on them according to their fancy and skill.

### **Henipai**

The male dress consists of a garment (henipai) which hangs down from the left shoulder, the front end reaching below the knee. Another piece of cloth known as 'peni' is fastened round the waist and the upper portion is secured to the body with a strip of a cloth called 'dindia'. Women's dress not so very different from that of man. A piece of cloth called 'aringmang'



The Zemis who are living in town or near the town are much influenced by the urban way of life and thus they use the scissors, combs, etc. for the hair do.

### **Food & Drink**

Rice is their staple food and some vegetables either raw or cooked and meat are also taken along with rice. Vegetables includes leaves of certain plants and also tree roots and tubers. They eat the flesh of both wild and domesticated animals. Among them the most important are the cows, pigs, mithuns, goats, fowl and fish, especially dried fish and some species of wild animals as well as birds. Pork is their favourite delicacy, Mithun meat features well during festivals. The animals fat is used as an eatable and also for preparing curry. Fats of animals (panan), after being boiled, is kept in a bamboo pipe which is placed above the hearth for some days until the fat decomposes and give off pungent smell, and later they are collected and stored. Dry fish (katiam) is also placed above the hearth as stored food. It has been stated that the intestines and blood of animals are boiled in water and eaten deliciously. This is in vogue only in interior villages, and not in town or in villages influenced by urban life. Just above the hearth a line is hung where large pieces of meat and fish are smoked and dried. These are usually preserved for a long time and when required, pieces are cut off and boiled or roasted on the fire for consumption.

### **Milk**

Previously it was in vogue that, women especially young girls, should not take milk and mutton (J.H. Hutton, 1921, pp. 95) for it was believed that milk and mutton greatly increased sensuality and eroticism. Men should not take the head of a fowl for they fear that if they do so they would fall down from the top of the trees. They also believed that eating the young shoots of the palm trees, which is sometimes used as vegetables, will make the eaters hair curly. These believes are not prevalent among the Zemis of the present day.

2. *Pei-Suk* : About half an inch above the ear the hair is cut at equal length all around the head so that it looks somewhat like a hat. The end of the hair is curled with the lips facing inwards touching the exposed portion of the skin.

3. *Ngga peit* : This type of hair style closely resembles the Angamis. It is like the 'pei-suk' style with the difference that the ends of the cropped hair are not coiled. In the centre of the head a small bunch of hair is grown long for the purpose of tying a white cotton ball (*Kelang kua*).

### **Married Female**

The unmarried females crop their hair short in the front just above the eye brows, then across the forehead more or less in a slightly semi-circular manner ending abruptly some distance behind the eye brows and thence trailing in thick, long strands round the head thereby concealing part of the face and the ear. This type of hair style is known as 'peibide'. Among the married women the hair at the back of the head is left as long as it would grow and it is plaited into two equal from the centre of the head. These braids are made in to a knot at the back of the head. This type of the hair style is known as 'kakeibe'.

### **Common Hair Style**

It may be noted that the 'Telap-pei' is the most common hair style especially among the young boys and other two styles are usually common among the old people. The similar styles are followed in different areas excepting the christians who generally follow the style of cropping the hair in orbital order similar to that of 'talap-pei'.

### **Primitive Method**

The primitive method of cutting the hair with a dao is still in vogue among the Zemis of the interior village and also the combs (*timrau*) of fine strips of bamboo are used by them.

a generation and which is usually a period of 25 years or so. The two main divisions of the year are the cold and the hot seasons. The cold season begins when dew is first seen and when the days are growing shorter. When the days are growing longer and when the voice of the cuckoo is heard, the hot season begins and it is time to sow the fields. The months are reckoned successively by the appearance of the new moon. The months are of course a lunar month although no one can say how many of such are there in a year. Only a few months have names, and other things are reckoned according to the agricultural operation, carried on during those times. They usually recognize the following months.

### **Kezing**

Is the month when sowing begins. It is equivalent to the month of March of the English calendar.

### **Gepi**

Is the month in which sowing is complete and is equivalent to the month of May of the English calendar.

### **Habai**

Is the month when the grains are ripened and the harvesting starts. It is equivalent to the month of October.

### **Heru**

Is the month when all the fields are harvested and it is equivalent to the month of November.

### **Ndui**

Is the month of taking the stock of the years labour and it is equivalent to December.

Directions can be vaguely expressed as towards sunrise and towards sunset, that is, east and west. There is no way accurately, of indicating north, south and so on.

## Meal Time

Meals are generally taken three times a day, in the morning, at midday and in the evening. Morning meals are taken just before going to the field. When going to work the midday meal is taken along with, wrapped up in plaintain leaf and eaten in the fields. Evening meals are taken after returning home from the field. Tea is not much favoured in the villages instead rice beer is a favourite drink, it is almost the staple article of consumption. There are three varieties of rice beer or 'zau'. The mildest is 'dekrizau' which is prepared from millet, 'nduzan' is of medium strength and is prepared from rice fermented with yeast made of wild leaves or roots, the third variety is known as 'nehiakne' which is a kind of liquor prepared by distilling rice or millet and is the strongest one. The first variety is a common family drink while the second and third are used only in festivals and by men only. Each family brews its own rice-beer which is made almost daily to keep pace with an increasing consumption.

## System of Recording time space and weight

In the interior villages the time is reckoned by looking at the sun. The day begins with the first cockcrow and with the rising of the sun.

With the rise of the sun the people become active and start for their respective work, and go to the fields. As the sun lower down to the west they start returning from the field and just before sunset they all return to homes and the night begins with the setting of the darkness, thus in the villages the days come and pass away and the people are not much bothered about the hours. The Zemis living in the town and in nearby villages reckon the time as the town people.

## Generation time scale

The long periods of time are usually measured in generations. The term of office of each set of Kadeipo or village headman is

## *Environmental Sanitation Recreation and Social Welfare*

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### **Fond of Dance**

The Zemis of North Cachar Hills are very fond of dances. Dances have a place in their festivals and also on ordinary occasions forming a part of their recreation. There are a number of dances and each with a different name. They are named after the manner in which hands and feet are executed to resemble the movements of a bird or an insect or an animal. For example, 'nruirelians', known as 'cock dance', that is, the dance which resembles the trait of a cock; 'gethinglm' or 'cricket' dance that is, a dance in which hands are moved to and fro. Somewhat resembling the movements of the insect, 'temangnetin' or the fly dance 'hetateulee or the Bare dence' which was usually done by men when defeating their enemies. All these dances are performed with the accompaniment of songs and music. Drums and cymbals are beaten at regular intervals while the singers array themselves on one side or form a circle so as to allow space for the dancers in the

The Zemis who are living in and near about the urban centres expresses the distances in miles.

But those who are living in villages often expresses the distance in miles vaguely. Invariably their guess about the distance comes out to be wrong. Usually, long distances are described in terms of the numbers of pipes which a traveller would smoke while covering the distance and generally one tobacco pipe is consumed while covering a distance of 2 or 3 miles. For shorter lengths, such as dimensions of a house, the length of the out stretched arm is the standard. The depth of water is reckoned by a man's height, while the height of a tree is spoken of as so many ladder steps.

Rice, maize and other food cereals are usually measured in a basket (kelung) which is the standard either for loan or for sale. While repaying the rice it is measured out in the same basket used at the time of borrowing. Rice is the only thing which is usually lent or sold and every one keeps such a standard basket in his house which generally holds about 5 seers of rice.

2. '*Teri*' It is a race run along the slope of a hill outside the villages, the destination being the centre of a village where a crowd awaits to receive the winner.

3. '*Hetung*' In this game a strong bamboo pole about 1 feet long is used and two or more combatants hold both ends of the pole and push the opponents backward until they fall down on the ground.

4. '*Hepua*' It is a wrestling competition between two persons, where one tries to lift the other by the waist and throw and throw him to the ground.

5. '*Mapei Kanbe*'—A big pole about 8 feet high well greased with fat is raised on the ground. On top of it is hung the head of a pig and the competitors try to climb up the pole and take away the pig's head.

Riddles also constitute some past times of both young boys and girls. Riddles are varied and are laden with meaning. As for example, to open the door of winds means to take fun ; to give water for curry ; to fish 'to hide hands' is to set traps for birds and animals or to hide some valuables 'to lose teeth' is to build one's own house ; to spread wings 'to build one's house with the help of friends and neighbours', to sit on the top of a tree but on the ground' is to pluck some branches of a tree for sitting on and rest on the ground, 'to but one's legs is to delay work ; 'to torow stone at the wooddecker but miss it and hit the wood' to make an honest man a scape goat. Sometime an enigmatic description of an object is given by a member of the party and the other member are asked to name that particular object.

The description given under leisure and recreation are based on field studies. Due to the impact of christianity and urbanization, the modern games and sports like playing with balls, badminton etc. are finding way into the Zeme society particularly among the school going children.

centre. As dancers have got different meanings and functions so also their songs. Songs which are generally and commonly sung by both young and old alike may be classified as follows :

### **Songs**

1. *Heliamleu* or dancing songs—they are composed and sung by young and old alike and are usually romantic.

2. *Hereileu* or war songs—composed by old people about the pride of their life, their by gone days, usually sung in memory of the victory or defeat in war.

3. '*Ndulen*' or legendary songs—Comosed by old men to commemorate any significant event old days or that of a person who had done something notable during his life time.

4. '*Hekialeu*' or songs about self—Thes songs are comosed by old men of their eventful career while they were young and strong.

5. '*Hekialeu*' or a duet—Composed by both young and old and is sung by yung boys and girls together.

### **Games**

Besides dances and songs, there are also various games played by both young and old for their recreation. Games are generally played during their festivals and sometimes also on ordinary occassions. Among the games usually played by the Zemis the most important are the following :

1. '*Hezua*' or long jump :— There is a mound of earth measuring about 4 feet in width and 30 feet in length usually in the centre of village. A slab of stone is laid at one end fo the mound. The jumper runs to ward it from some distance, pause for an instant on the stone for balancing the body and then jump. The distance is usually measured by the marks made by the feet where the jumpers land on the mound.



the urban ways of life, particularly those who are living near the urban centres, but even in such cases the rules of their traditional customs and manners still hunt them and are not therefore easily forgotten by them. Their tribal religion has undergone a slight change, This is due to the adverse economic conditions and other calamities which ruin their economy. Since their religion is mostly concerned with the performances of sacrifices of animals so it entails much expenditure. In the face of poverty and unavoidable hardships, it becomes easier if the restrictions and barriers imposed by their religion were removed as early as possible. So after such realization they are now gradually making some changes in their social customs and manners. They now believe that sacrifices to the gods should be limited to the bare minimum and that festivals which involve too much out lay of money be abandoned.

#### **Outdated Agricultural Implements :**

With their outdated and worn out agricultural implements and tools they are forced to till the unfriendly and unyielding soil. Improvement in their method of cultivation is necessary and better seeds, better manure and improved implements are all the more necessary to better their economy. There is neither any co-operative society where the cultivators can offer his products for sale at a reasonable rate and avail the facilities of improving his lot, nor does the community has any idea of it. Community development blocks which are meant to better the life of the rural people in every respect of their social and economic structure do not throw light on their community particularly in the interior villages. Education which is an important factor to raise the standard of the rural community seem to have little value to the community as is seen from the percentage of literacy. Hence one of primary needs of the community at present is a really efficient and cheap system of education that may give them a chance to get themselves acquainted with the world of knowledge and learning, particularly in the interior villages. There are some welfare agencies run by the Presbyterian Mission like free distribution of some medicines, and schools etc. at Haflong.

## **Sanitation Absent**

Sanitation, in the real sense of the term, is totally absent in Zemi village. There is no drainage system in or around the houses and foul water finds its way out in the village streets. In the interior villages there are no pit latrine or any lavatory and the nearby jungle is used for such purposes where pigs perform the task of sweepers. The Zemi villages which are nearby the urban centres are sometimes found to have the pit latrine system in some houses. As there is no dustbin all waste matters are scattered around the houses and rubbish is thrown carelessly along the village footpaths. Thus the village paths become filthy and stinky especially during the rains emitting foul smell.

As far as the persons are concerned they are clean and wash themselves frequently. Near every village washing places are always to be found where men and women stop to wash their hands and feet on their way to and from the fields. The teeth are cleaned by brushing with a small stick, usually the bark of a wild plant and rinsing with water. Soap is now in use in those villages which are nearer the town while in interior villages the bark of the tree which produces a foam like soap is used.

Before taking meals people usually rinse their hands with water. Wooden and earthen dishes are usually, though not thoroughly, washed after use. But earthen cooking pots and vessels do not receive such hygienic treatment. These are generally rinsed with only a small quantity of water, since the villagers fear that too much washing of cooking pots and pans may cause the article to break too early.

## **SOCIAL WELFARE**

### **No Urban Influence**

The life of the Zemis remains much the same as is to be expected of a community which has not been influenced by

1	2	3	4	5
Puakpat	Hebai- Heru	October Nov-	Before harvest begins <i>i.e.</i> when the grains are ripened.	in conn- ection with culti- vation.
Nsiamngi	Heru-Ndui	Nov. Dec.	When all fields are harvested.	
Hega or Ngidi	Ndui	Dec.	Taking stock of the years labour.	

*Heleikanebe* : This festival is usually performed by every household in honour of Tingwang who is supposed to be responsible for the success in cultivation. It merely entails the killing of an animal, except goat and the feasting of friends on the meat of the animal killed. The priest (ting kupeu) prays to Tingwang to bring good harvest. The ting kupeu will then take a little grain of seeds which he sows at the village gate. The offshoots of the seeds will indicate prosperity or otherwise.

*Nehangbam* :—During 'Nehangbam' festival no wood is cut and paddy is neither husked nor spread to dry in the sun, as it is believed that if it is done the seeds sown in the fields will not thrive but may dry up like the wood cut. Pigs, or fowl are killed by the priest as an offering to Tingwang as the one who pours these blessings to the seeds. The blood and intestine of the animals killed are offered to Tingwang while the meat is taken by friends and relatives.

*Puakpat* :—It is celebrated when the grains are ripe and marks the beginning of the harvest. On this occasion all male folks must obtain from rice and beef and also the flesh of buffaloes but may only drink *zau* and eat the flesh of other animals. On this day all males wash themselves in the nearby stream and bring fresh water in new 'hepiak' (bamboo pipes) and would not use the old water that has been stored in house. They must collect the fermented rice contributed by each one

## *Festivals*

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### Community Festivals

The festivals observed by the community are all connected with cultivation. Each of these festivals does not seem to be obligatory for any one to perform, and is in fact usually performed only by one who can afford. The following table gives the names of festivals with the dates of their performances and their underlying significance.

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Name of Festival	Corresponding Month	English Equivalent	Significance	Remarks
1	2	3	4	5
Heleikanebe	Kezing-Keram	March April	After harvesting is performed at the beginning of the sowing season.	All these festivals
Nehangbam	Gepei	May	The completion of sowing season.	are performed

## Mithun Hunting

The most notable feature on this occasion is the traditional mithun hunt (Kabui'nsa) which is performed on the same day. In this hunt a competition is held between the members of the hangseoki (morung) to capture the mithun, and any one who wins the game gets the head of the mithun. The flesh of the animal is cooked and eaten by all the members together. It may be noted that in this 'hega' or 'ngidi' festival no genna is observed except by the household where parents have died sometime during the year. In the hunt generally a big buffalo or mithun having large horns chosen for the chase. Its horns are closely wrapped and coiled with thick creepers to prevent any fatal injury to the chaser. The chase is, by tradition, a stern test of nerve and stamina. The men who take part in this chase wear nothing except the kilt. Before the chase the participants take rice beer which acts as a stimulant. On the day fixed for the hunt, all women, children and the disabled are shut in doors and every house front is tightly closed. The animal is taken to the morungs porch where it is firmly tied to a post. The Tingkupeu takes a stout stick and one elder man cuts the rope with a dao with which the animal is tied. At the same time when the rope is cut, the Tingkupeu gives a strong blow with his stick on the horns of the animal. The infuriated beast on finding it self free rushes down the village street with the young men leaping wildly on its heels. The chasers stumble and fall and again rise on their feet, scramble, and keep on chasing the beast until it rushes to the nearby jungle. The real game is played in the jungle. the chasers make loud shouts and when one of them gets a tight hold of its tail, he shouts for his friends and all of them rush towards the spot for the animal in its track. The animal is securely bound and throw against the ground. The chasers will not be considered victorious, unless they fell the animal once during the chase, though, any one of them may get hold of its horns. Sometimes the infuriated beast, instead of running away tries to attack them. instead picking up the scent of its enemies who by that time seek safety on the branches of trees. When the animal misses its

among the adult male folks in the village to make *zau* with the new water which they have brought and then they eat and drink on that day. On this occasion women are not allowed to eat together with men (Hodson 1911, p. 171) which still holds true, and do not take part with men in the feast.

The meal and the *zau* which can not be consumed during the day is to be buried in a pit. On the following day the whole village abstains from working in their fields and stay at home. No sacrifice is offered to *Tingwang* on this occasion. On the next day reaping begins.

*'Nsianingi'* :—This festival is celebrated when all fields are harvested and all the grain reaped by every one is carried home. In this festivals men eat together with women but sleep apart from them at night. On this occasion also men go to fetch new water in new *'hepiak'* and wash themselves. The water is used only by men for washing and cooking. The village folk do not go to work on that day and no one goes anywhere. The whole village makes merriment and eats and drinks at will. Young boys and girls sing and dance, eat and drink in their respective clubs. It may be noted that the feast on this occasion is held by voluntary contributions in kind which each of the members brings, namely, a basket of rice or fowl. The adult males also join and contribute liberally in kind.

*Hega or Ngidi* :—This is the most important of all the festivals observed by the *Zemis*. *'Nnduikou'* means 'gathering month', it generally takes place at the end of December. This festival marks the end of the year's labour and they turn their grateful eyes to *Tingwang* to thank him for his blessings and guidance throughout the year. In this occasion they eat, drink and make merriment. On this day the *Tingkupeu* takes a fowl to the village gate where it is killed and its blood offered to *Tingwang*. Mean while *Tingkupeu* prays to *Tingwang* and prays him to accept his humble offering and at the same time implores him to continue to pour his blessings in the coming year. The flesh of the sacrificial fowl is *genna* to both men and women as it is meant only for *Tingwang*.

December. Just at mid night at 12 o'clock the Church bells toll announcing the birth anniversary of Christ and people come to the church to offer their prayers and song. The Church elder a pastor conducts the ceremony and gives a sermon relating to the birth of Christ. The next day the Church organizes a meeting in which a ceremony consisting of songs, Bible reading, sermon and prayers are performed in the church. On the same day or on the following day the church members will have a feast in which rice and meat are served. The church members make contribution whatever they can afford which ranges between Rs. 0.50 to Rs. 3.00. Young and old alike take part in the feast. On the New Year day, similar meetings are organized by the church at 12 o'clock at midnight i.e. on the 31st of December. On the following day or any day convenient to them they will organize a feast, sometimes non-Christians also take part in this feast. The rate of contribution is similar as on the Christmas feast and young and old alike take part.

enemies it invariably rushes towards the thick undergrowth of the jungle and immediately the chasers run toward the animal and scramble and over power the animal. The person who first catches hold of the mithun's horns is the winner, he twists the head of the animal, grabbing it by its horns, and forces the animal to sink down on the ground. The captured animal is then tied and brought to the 'hangseoki', where it is killed and feasted. The head of the animal is awarded as a prize to the winner who first catches hold of the mithun's horn.

### Herakuabe

There is another important ceremony observed by the community which is not connected with cultivation. It is known as 'herakuabe; meaning driving away the evil spirits and is performed once a year. The tingkupeu invokes the help of Tingwang to drive away the diseases from the village. On this day all male members go to the nearby stream and wash themselves. After their return the priest kills a cock. The cock killed is cooked and eaten by the priest himself.

The villagers eat pork and beef and drink zau. On this occasion the men live apart from the women and they refrain from drawing any water. The whole village is prohibited from going to work and going out and coming to the village is strictly prohibited. On the following day the tingkupeu takes a dog with him, which is fastened with a least and he goes up and down the village shouting in a raucous voice that no person should leave his house as the evil spirits are proceeding to their habitation. The dog is then killed outside the village and the priest returns home after which the life returns to normalcy.

### Christmas

Among the Christian Zemies, Christmas is celebrated on the 25th while the Christmas feast accompanying it is performed, sometimes on the 25th or sometimes on the 26th or 27th December according to convenience. When ever it may be the birth of Christ is observed on the midnight of the 24th



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